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## GOVERNMENT

# Policy and the public purse

Burke Trend

LEO PLATZKY

*Getting and Spending*  
240pp, Oxford: Blackwell, £12.  
0 631 12907 3

JOEL BARNETT

*Inside the Treasury*  
200pp, Deutsch, £8.95.  
0 233 97394 X

"If we are asked what are, or should be, the limits of public expenditure, in one sense this involves value judgments about the kind of society we want." We may, I think, agree with Leo Platzky on this point; but we may then be provoked to ask by whom these judgments are, or should be, formulated. The orthodox answer, to which Platzky himself subscribes, is that they are made by Ministers, who are the elected representatives of the people, and that the function of civil servants consists mainly of advising their political masters about the range of policy options open to them and the methodology of implementing the decisions implicit in the choices which they make. But if the plain man has instinctive doubts about the adequacy of so simple and arbitrary a distinction between ends and means, they are unlikely to be wholly dispelled by either of the two books under review.

Platzky is concerned with the means rather than the ends; but when he admits, in a revealing aside, that "I took naturally to the austere Treasury ethos towards the use of public money", he is to some extent giving the game away. Evidently, the Treasury has an ethos of its own; and that ethos favours austerity. Spending money, like eating people, is wrong. Here, certainly, is a value judgment; but by whom is it taken? Not – at least not willingly – by the Cabinet as a whole; nearly all its members, as Joel Barnett testifies with rueful candour, would like to spend more money rather than less, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer is normally a lone voice in preaching economy. Why then does he preach it? Because his advisers counsel him to do so. And why do they offer this counsel? Because the facts of the situation, correctly interpreted, permit no alternative.

Treasury officials, in my experience, are decent, honourable men; endowed with above average intelligence; and having their fair share of human

warmth and sympathy. But they are also realists, sadly aware of the apparently incurable propensity of mankind to succumb to the temptations of extravagance and self-indulgence; and the desk of each of them displays, metaphorically if not literally, the precept of the good Butler (the Bishop not the politician, although the latter would not, I think, have dissented) that "Things and actions are what they are; and their consequences will be what they will be. Why then should we desire to be deceived?" The Treasury has an intellectual conviction, founded on not inconsiderable experience, that you cannot get a quart out of a pint pot; and from this flows a moral conviction that it is wrong to deceive yourself, to say nothing of others, that you can, or should try to, do so. If you do, it will assuredly end in tears. But need it? Why not simply enlarge the pot? This is a solution which has an irresistible attraction for politicians. The reader who has the patience – and the stamina – to follow Platzky through the successive stages in the development of the concept of public expenditure will discover why all too often it is not a solution at all – but simply an aggravation of the problem.

To begin with, there is the conceptual question – how large is a pint? Platzky's chapter on "What is public expenditure?" should be required reading for all, whether politicians or administrators, who are tempted to venture into this semantic minefield; and they should be compelled thereafter to pass a stiff test on the relationship between public expenditure and the gross domestic product (GDP) before they can expect to be accepted as qualified practitioners in this particular discipline. But, mercifully, it was not always so. In the good old days public expenditure meant merely the sum of separate departmental programmes; and all that you needed in order to deal with it was the simple ability to add two and two together and to decide that the answer ought to be rather less than four. Nobody, in short, made any serious attempt to formulate a reasoned judgment about the scale of aggregate acceptable expenditure; and the elaborate ritual of Budget Day really amounted to little more than the Treasury's adding up the individual departmental bids and considering whether the total was "too much" or could be made to be "just right" in

relation to whatever changes in taxation the Chancellor of the Exchequer had in mind.

This final and critical act in the process, however, the act of striking the "correct" balance between expenditure and income, was something which he kept very much to himself. And he did the exercise only one year at a time. Implicit in this procedure was a tacit, but important, assumption, recognized and accepted by the rest of Whitehall, that the Treasury, as the paid piper, was entitled to call the tune and that, in default of any other centre of authority for the purpose, it was the Treasury's rightful function to exercise whatever degree of constraint and co-ordination of separate departmental programmes might be required in order to ensure that the totality of public expenditure was held within the limits which the Treasury itself prescribed. And from this assumption flowed the proprietorial attitude which the Treasury has always tended to display towards the revenue surrendered by the taxpayer to the Exchequer; in an undefinable but subtle and pervasive way this became the Treasury's own money and the Treasury alone was entitled to say how, in accordance with its self-prescribed standards of prudence and thrift, that money should be spent. As a result, the Treasury maintained for many years a primacy which extended beyond the merely financial concerns of the Government and came to comprise the oversight and co-ordination of Governmental policies as a whole. Its Permanent Secretary became the Official Head of the Home Civil Service, enjoying considerable powers of patronage in relation to senior appointments throughout Whitehall. It recruited its own élite by transferring to itself the most talented staff of other departments, who regarded it as an honour to be invited to leave them. Its pre-eminence was absolute and its word was final; from its Rhadamanthine judgments there was no appeal.

After the war, largely in response to the impact of Keynesian economics and the rising demands of the new welfare state, an effort was made to deal with matters rather more systematically, by attempting to relate individual decisions on public expenditure to a comprehensive survey

of the real resources of the economy, extending over several years ahead; it was agreed that one must first discover how much the pot really contained, or could be made to contain in the foreseeable future, before deciding whether it could be persuaded, in any given year, to yield only a pint or rather more. The system – known to the cognoscenti as PESC, an acronym derived from the Public Expenditure Survey Committee which supervised its operation – was constructed in terms of functional programmes rather than spending authorities; the programmes themselves were coded not at current prices but in terms of constant prices; and in due course novel and unprecedented bodies – such as the National Economic Development Council and the Department of Economic Affairs – appeared on the scene, challenging the Treasury's sole authority to decide the limits of public expenditure and offering alternative, usually more attractive and optimistic, interpretations of what the nation could afford to spend in terms of the likely growth in the real resources at its disposal. But when it came to translating the calculation into the financial terms required by the annual Budget occasion in the House of Commons, these innovators were not allowed to meddle with the other side of the account; taxation policy remained the strict preserve of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, closely protected by his tight-lipped experts somewhere deep in the heart of the Treasury's citadel, their hands keeping a firm hold on the levers of fiscal and monetary power.

Was it partly as a result of this dichotomy between planning and control that the PESC system began to falter in its aim? In 1963 the NEDC postulated an economic growth rate of 4 per cent a year, a figure which proved quite unrealistic but nevertheless made it politically impossible to plan long-term public expenditure on any other basis, despite the inevitable strain on the balance of payments. A year or so later the DEA adopted, as the basis of its National Plan, which Platzky amusingly describes as "a sort of What's On in Whitehall", an even higher rate of assumed economic growth, which, by tilting the allocation of resources still further towards public expenditure rather than the balance of payments, contributed directly to the devaluation of 1967. Two years later the DEA was quietly and

unobtrusively disbanded; and the Treasury came back into its own, to resume the unhampered control of public expenditure with such success that, within a short time, the balance of payments on both current and capital account was more favourable than at any point since the war – but only at the cost of the rising prices and rising wage claims which finally led to the fall of the first Wilson Government.

Under its Conservative successor, the PESC system, now partially discredited as "purely incremental", was reinforced by a system of Programmes Analysis and Review (PAR) which sought to reintroduce a qualitative element into the control of public expenditure by subjecting selected departmental policies to critical examination in cost-benefit terms. But this system, too, proved inadequate to the pressures to which it was subjected. As Platzky observes, "To the extent that the PAR system was designed to take a radical look at policies and not merely at methods of carrying them out, there was a lack of reality about the idea that the whole organic process of policy formation could somehow be subordinated to a mechanical procedure. Spending Ministers and their departments simply did not put the crucial policy issues in their fields on the PAR list." In other words, value judgment stopped just at the points where it was most important that it should begin.

It is not wholly surprising, therefore, that inflation continued to rise remorselessly, compounded by the re-emergence of unemployment on a scale which prompted the Heath Government. But Ministers still adhered to the constant prices system in planning public expenditure, with the result that programmes were maintained, and sometimes expanded, in volume terms no matter how great the rise in the amount of money involved. In response to the renewed pressure on the balance of payments, the Government was compelled to adopt a floating rate for the pound in mid-1972; but, despite this easing of the strain on the economy, the rise in public expenditure began once more to outstrip the growth of the GDP and by the beginning of 1974 the Government was no longer able to enforce its will against determined industrial resistance to an incomes policy which had been designed to keep price

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inflation within reasonable limits but was fatally undermined by the dramatic increase in oil prices.

Under the second Wilson Government, the depressingly familiar process seemed set to begin yet once more.

In its first year, public expenditure rose by 12.2 per cent; the GDP, on the other hand, showed a small absolute decline. In Piaty's words: "The divorce between the collective decision-making process on public expenditure and the Treasury's budget-making process remained total." But the Treasury was beginning to reassert itself; and money, more money, was ready to return to the centre of the stage. Partly in reinforcement of an incomes policy which strove to gear cash provision to a prescribed rate of wage increases, the concept of cash limits became fashionable, with the implication that, no matter what volume programmes were approved at constant prices, their translation into cash provision at current prices would be limited in advance in cash terms. Gradually, as Piaty says, "the emphasis was being shifted from medium-term planning to short-term control, though still against the background of a medium-term dimension." He himself makes no secret of his desire to get rid of the constant prices hypothesis and to frame forward surveys in current prices or, more accurately, in terms of the prices expected to be current in the future years with which successive surveys were concerned. He could not press the point too far since, as he admits, "if we were to do our cash projections on the assumption of 5 or 10 per cent inflation and if prices actually went up by 15 per cent a year, it was not to be expected that the Government would cut the physical size of programmes year by year to fit the cash projections." But this, or something very like this, is precisely what the present Government, coming into office after the Callaghan winter of discontent, has set itself to do and its first White Paper in March 1980, announced uncompromisingly that.

"The Government intend to reduce public expenditure progressively in volume terms over the next four years." Although performance fell short of promise in the first year, largely as the result of an industrial recession of unforeseeable severity, the issue of the struggle is still to be decided; and, meanwhile, money has been largely restored to its primary as the indifferent measure of all things and the Treasury is firmly back in the saddle, riding economy on a short rein. In 1981 it managed to carry the doctrine of cash limits to its logical conclusion by at last abandoning constant prices and carrying out the forward survey in cash terms. Even Piaty is taken aback when he contemplates the possible results - "It defies credibility that programmes in 1984-5 should be predestined to volume cuts across the board in order to conform to a cash figure fixed in 1981", and he makes it clear that he would prefer a more cautious and realistic approach in the form of a compromise between cash planning in the first year of a survey period and programming in real terms for the subsequent years. He concludes, with true Treasury caution, that there is no real need to foreclose our future options in this respect. But he adds - and here is the nub of his book - that "the proportion of GDP going to public expenditure should be determined within a reasonable margin of error, by economic and social policy decisions, not by loss of control."

There, in nothing, progressive or democratic about poor financial control, wasteful use of resources or inflationary financing. It is a value judgment which rings true; and here, in a properly political definition of economy, the historical Treasury ethos finds its authentic contemporary expression.

But how far is it accepted as a criterion by the Ministers with whom, in Piaty's view, the final decision on issues of policy should rest? Joe Barnett deals with only a few years of the period which Piaty chronicles - the five years from 1974 during which he was Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Chancellor of the Exchequer's first lieutenant, with particular responsibility for controlling public expenditure. He confesses in his introduction that he started for an optimistic mission to work out the economic success he hoped we would achieve and to do all those things we had been fighting for in the Labour

movement; and yet, five years later "I finished as an undoubted pessimist, at least as far as Britain's general economic and industrial performance is concerned." What went wrong? Why did it prove impossible to extract the quart from that obstinate pint pot? There was evidently no question of any personal or even any intellectual incompatibility between the politician and the civil servant who was his principal adviser. He got on well with Piaty, whom he describes as "my most fascinating Permanent Secretary, who had been in the Research Department of the Fabian Society before joining the Civil Service." (And what, incidentally, is one supposed to infer from that?) Moreover, he had, like Piaty, an instinctive disposition towards economy and austerity, a disposition fostered by a modest domestic upbringing and an invaluable introduction to politics at the grass roots. Unlike some of our current political mentors he understood from the beginning what makes the ordinary voter tick. He should have been well placed to bring to the control of public expenditure the kind of informed and sensitive political judgment which Piaty, in common with all right-thinking civil servants, regards as the special prerogative of Ministers. Why, then, does he regard his four years in office as a failure?

A careful reading of his book suggests several reasons. At the outset, in Opposition, "We in the shadow Treasury team did little or nothing about how much, or rather how little, total public expenditure would be available and how it should be divided in terms of priorities." But why not? What prevented them from pondering these problems, at least provisionally, and examining, at least hypothetically, various possible solutions for them? There may be material here for those would-be reformers of the Parliamentary process who believe that it is important to equip the shadow Government with a shadow bureaucracy, as its own source of information, advice and warning. Later, in office, Barnett tries to explain how "the system could defeat even Ministers like myself, who had remained in one post for a rather long time by modern standards." But how did it defeat them? Partly by confronting them with a bewildering diversity of choice - "We had a whole range of different options... on every conceivable kind of taxation from income tax to gambling duties." But is not this precisely what officials are meant, and paid, to do? And how would Ministers react if they had reason to suppose that their advisers had not exposed to them the full scope of possible choice?

Then there was the tiresome business of Cabinet committees, where the Chief Secretary was almost inevitably in a minority of one and had painfully to learn the basic play of trying to persuade one spending Minister to come down against another Minister's plans, even if for no better or more logical reason than to protect his own departmental expenditure. Barnett roundly condemns such Ministerial meetings; they are "just about the worst possible way of arriving at sensible decisions." But he is human enough to describe, with a touch of gleeful satisfaction, how, on one occasion when the Cabinet were debating the reductions in expenditure which were the necessary price of assistance from the International Monetary Fund in 1976, "I got £180 million out of the £200 million for which I had asked, when I would have been quite happy to settle for £100 million." And he does not, at any point in his narrative, offer any alternative to the committee system which would be conceivable, within the principle of collective responsibility.

Finally, once again there were those inescapable official advisers, hoping to rattle their Minister by putting up long and complex briefs which purportedly quitted misleadingly - to require immediate decision and, when they were rebuffed, accepting rejection of their advice with the philosophical assurance which comes naturally to those who know that they will continue to be in power long after the Minister of the day has disappeared. At one point, towards the end of the last Labour Government, Barnett confronted with the Sec. of the Treasury, another friend of expenditure, and complains that "Officials came up with a list that I can only assume they put to me out of pure devotion. I thought at the time that it was the end of the day

would put to a Tory Chief Secretary; and that view was confirmed when I saw the first list of cuts of the new Conservative Government." Poor officials! Their professional ethos, grounded in the Treasury's gritty experience of successive Governments over many long years, had prompted them to do their best to prescribe for their patient as dispassionately as they could, with the kind of single-minded concern to cure him which would concern to cure him which would be much the same when the next patient appeared complaining of identical symptoms. In so doing, they saw themselves as serving the national interest; it was their misfortune - and the nation's? - that their value judgment on this point came into conflict with another value judgment, framed by reference to rather different criteria.

But Barnett is an honest and generous man; and he readily admits that it was not the fault of the officials that the economy did not achieve the rate of growth which the Government had adopted as its target. From the outset Ministers showed themselves reluctant to grapple with the real causes of the problem. "When they came into office in 1974, 'There was a sort of collective guilt complex round the Cabinet table which led to 'employment measures' that were far from being cost-effective. Indeed, overall they must have run directly counter to the main problem we faced, which was low productivity." Five years later, as the Government staggered to its fall, things were no better; and Barnett can record that "there were still some Cabinet Ministers who viewed even private criticism of the trade unions as an act of treachery. Every conceivable excuse was sought for actions that, for many of us, were inexcusable." Barnett attributes a heavy burden of responsibility to his colleagues. It is, again, Ministers rather than officials who were to blame for the Government's failure to achieve either the correct balance between public and private expenditure, or the right priorities in public expenditure itself. "Expenditure priorities were generally decided on often out-dated and ill-considered plans made in Opposition, barely thought through as to their real value and never as to their relative priority in social, industrial or economic terms."

And so it came about that Ministers succumbed to the perennial temptation to cut capital, rather than current, expenditure, to defer expenditure on new prisons or hospitals rather than to reduce the number of wardens or nurses, thus contributing even further to the low rate of economic growth which they were constantly deploping. Conversely, far too much of the expenditure which they did sanction was pre-empted by non-selective subsidies to such categories as housing, transport and school meals, all such highly emotive areas that Barnett was forced to conclude that it was impossible to have them discussed rationally by Cabinet at all. The same reluctance to face the real problem lay at the root of the Government's failure to establish effective control over local authority expenditure, which both Barnett and Piaty identify as one of the largest of the holes in the leaking sieve. "Talk of 'increasing council house rents', says Barnett, "and it was as if you were planning to snatch children from their mothers or put them to work down a mine."

The effects of this weakness of political perception and political will were aggravated by the intractable nature of the material with which Ministers were required to work - the unreliability of successive forecasts of the borrowing requirement; the arbitrary character of alternative decisions of public expenditure, which could vary so widely that on one occasion a single stroke of the pen would be enough to eliminate \$4 billion from the estimated cost of debt interest; and, perhaps above all, the sheer unpredictability of those things which seemed to be beyond any human capacity for foresight or control, the maddening way in which cuts in public expenditure would either be subject to so long a time-lag in making their impact that the Government would have largely disappeared by the time that they began to do their work or would prove to have been unnecessary in the light of an unexpected recovery which would have rendered them superfluous. It was, in a particularly



"Les Visiteurs" (c 1924-25) by Fernand Léger, a painting in oils depicting the artist and Léonce Rosenberg during their visit to Rome in 1924. It was included in a recent exhibition at the Leffevre Gallery, 30 Bruton St, London W1, where it can still be seen until the end of August.

striking passage Piaty, after describing the drastic reductions which, with much reluctance and after prolonged agonizing, the Government made in 1976 at the behest of the IMF, writes the epitaph on the whole sorry story in a single sentence - "Unknown to us at the time, unplanned shortfall was much bigger than the planned reductions which had brought the Government of the country to crisis point." Floughing through the record of the Cabinet's interminable battles over this confused and depressing terrain, battles which Barnett chronicles with a wealth of statistical detail (and some entertaining side-kicks at the more wayward habits of some of his Ministerial colleagues), one realizes why he finds it all, as he says, "rather depressing."

It is a small masterpiece of understatement. The impact of the experience described in these two books is not merely depressing; it is also potentially damaging, not least because its pervasive implication of middle and mismanagement at the centre of Government may lead to undermine both the magnitude of our achievement in steering the economy through the traumatic years since the war and the difficulty of maintaining the same degree of instinctive self-confidence and self-respect in the no less problematical years which lie ahead. To a large extent the failures and frustrations which Barnett recalls are inevitable in a society which has shown itself able, over little more than the span of a generation, to sustain so concurrently a major readjustment of its international status and a social revolution of unparalleled generality while preserving a system of Parliamentary democracy which offers a more effective guarantee of individual political liberty than any other form of government. We are still the most decent, liberal and tolerant country in the world; and, if we have generated in the electorate an expectation of services and benefits which can only be satisfied by a level of public expenditure which is constantly exceeding our willingness to create the means whereby to pay for it, we have done so for commendable reasons of human sympathy, if a genuine attempt to improve the lot of the poor and the handicapped. We have no need to regret the welfare state or to apologize for our system of social services and, so long as we retain an active social conscience, the level of public expenditure will continue to press hard on the capacity of the economy to sustain it at any realistic rate of economic growth, and the

remains one of the anomalies of both our constitutional practice and our administrative practice that, whereas we seek to assist an individual Minister to discharge his responsibilities by giving him the support of a whole department of experienced advisers, we make no corresponding provision when Ministers gather round the Cabinet table in order to take collective decisions which, almost by hypothesis,

are more difficult, more important and more politically critical than any of the issues which are likely to confront them in their separate departments. In one sense it is right and proper that, at that point, they should be left to themselves, to consult whatever resources of individual wisdom and conscience they can command. That is the essence of democratic accountability. In another sense, however, it is a defect in the system that they should lack the reinforcement of administrative machinery of their own, which would provide them with advice analogous to the advice which a department supplies to its Minister - with the difference that it would be advice provided by a staff under their collective authority, tendered to them in their collective capacity and addressed to them in terms of their collective responsibility.

It was the lack of the capability to supply advice of this kind that Haldane deplored; and it was to remedy this deficiency that the Central Policy Review Staff (CPRS) was originally created in 1970, rather more than half a century after Haldane had submitted his report. As its name implies, it was to constitute, at the centre of Government, that nucleus of objective, undistracted, synoptic and multi-disciplinary assessment of problems of policy which Haldane recommended. It was to help the Government to stand back from the tangled detail of day-to-day administration, to view its achievements, and its prospects, in the wider perspective of its conception of the national interest in the longer term and above all, to tackle that most difficult of all political tasks - finding time simply to think, to evaluate and to decide, with discipline and discrimination. In its first few years the CPRS made a valiant attempt to supply that kind of service; but latterly it seems to have regressed into becoming merely one more piece of machinery for the examination of the more complex problems that arise between departments. It does not even rate a mention in the index to Barnett's book, while Piaty can record his conviction that, in his time, it made little significant difference to the operation of the Cabinet machinery as regards the control of public expenditure - which was his responsibility. If that is so, a great opportunity has been lost, for it is precisely in the area of this responsibility that a Government needs to exercise its most difficult and most critical function - the function of reaching decisions and, therefore, exercising choices between alternative courses of action.

Throughout both the books which are the subject of this review, the word "priorities" recurs with a kind of mournful insistence. If only we could get the priorities right, all would be well. As Barnett recalls, "Nye Bevan once said, 'The language of priorities is the religion of Socialism.' In my experience of office this was a faith that had been lost in the sheer grid of day-to-day government." But priorities are, or should not be, a matter of only Socialist conviction; nor was Barnett's the only administration to suffer that particular loss of faith. As one follows Barnett and Piaty through their parallel heart-searchings about the control of public expenditure one is brought up short, time after time, by the paucity of reference, in any depth, to the great issues of national and international policy which were simultaneously confronting the Government of the day. It can fairly be argued in extenuation of both authors that they are addressing themselves to the question of public expenditure and that it is therefore inevitable - and valuable - that they should be concerned to deal mainly with the conceptual and practical problems of

that intricate subject. But one is still entitled to regret the absence of any sustained reference to the wider context in which those problems had to find their due place. Did Barnett and Piaty never reflect on what they, and their respective colleagues, as defenders of devolution, Northern Ireland, Rhodesia and the EEC, in relation to their primary task of managing the public purse? Did they never allow their own value judgments to be influenced by the relative priorities which they thought should be allotted to these problems of policy in the context of the Government's strategy as a whole? If they did, they have kept their conclusions to themselves, at least so far as their published books are concerned.

Their reticence makes it all the more significant that one of the first tasks assigned to the CPRS on its creation was the preparation of a study of the priorities of public expenditure which, when approved by Ministers, was to provide the guidelines for the annual PESC review. It was to be drafted jointly with the Treasury, not by the Treasury alone; and the particular value judgment which the Treasury was to be relied upon to import into any and every debate on public expenditure was to be supplemented by a value judgment of a rather different kind, a judgment responsive to the political philosophy of the Government of the day and formed with due regard to the relative importance of the objectives of national policy to which Ministers attached particular weight. It was an experiment of considerable potential significance; but it does not seem to have taken permanent root, any more than does the CPRS's other innovative technique, the periodical presentation to the Cabinet of a progress report on the Government's record of achievement in relation to its declared purposes. The CPRS itself, perhaps surprisingly, has survived two changes of Government. But so far as can be judged from outside Whitehall, it seems to have lost sight of its original and essential objective and the studies of particular topics and problems, which it has seen as constituting its main role in recent years, valuable though they may be, are no substitute for its primary function of enabling a Government to evaluate its priorities in closer and more perceptive relation to the totality of its policies and by reference to more inclusive criteria of value than those which the Treasury normally employs.

"At the end of the day," as Barnett observes, "no better way has been devised than having a bunch of men and women of varying intelligence (known in our system as a Cabinet) taking every conceivable form of advice and information, asking hopefully the right questions and coming to a judgment." If we wish to remain free and liberal society, he is absolutely right. But it is the provision of the advice and information which matters; and here we seem still to have much to learn. Our Victorian forefathers were familiar with a subject called political economy - something with a more comprehensive scope than the quantitative econometric science which is the currently fashionable manifestation of economics, something which allowed for judgment about the qualitative element in the daily lives of the ordinary men and women who constitute the electorate, something which came rather closer to the art of managing the affairs of a community with prudence, humanity and thrift. Both Barnett and Piaty allow us to infer that it is this concept, the concept of the good housekeeping of a nation which needs to be restored both to political debate and to administrative practice if we are to be more successful than hitherto in achieving our ends within our available means.

The recently published *Year Book of Social Policy in Britain 1980-1981* (200pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul, £1.95, 0 7100 9083 8) spans a period of eleven months and appears for the first time under the editorship of Catherine Jones and June Stevenson. In their introduction, the editors note "significant changes both within social policy and in the academic study of social policy" - changes which receive due emphasis in the selection of contributions that "explore and question some of the conventional wisdoms". Thus, three papers examine the nature of the welfare state and the distribution of power within it;

## Averting Armageddon

Michael Mason

JONATHAN SCHELL

*The Fate of the Earth*  
244pp. Cape. £7.95 (paperback,  
Picador £1.95).  
0 224 02064 1

This book has had a very great success in America. Its British publishers have hopes of a similar enthusiasm for it over here. There is reported to be a boom in Britain for books questioning current policies on nuclear weapons. In America an upsurge of popular feeling of surprising dimensions is taking place against these weapons. All these facts are wonderfully encouraging, and the shortcomings of *The Fate of the Earth* which I shall mention should not obscure them. Its influence in the controversy over nuclear arms can only preponderate on the side of reduction or abolition; its publication makes these outcomes more likely than they would otherwise have been. But it is important to ask if this book, which is likely to be much resorted to for arguments by the anti-nuclear movement, puts forward the best of the arguments, or advocates the most reasonable solutions; and, naturally, to consider the application of this American discussion to Britain and Europe. One of the best things about Jonathan Schell's undertaking is that he would surely welcome this kind of enquiry. *The Fate of the Earth* is an admirably serious book, avowedly hectoring and cutting corners, it strives all the time to be as lucid and accurate as possible about its momentous subject.

The importance, for the prospects of disarmament, of getting the arguments right can be lost sight of, especially when the tide of protest is running strongly. One reason for the decay of the British CND movement of the late 1950s must be that it emphasized the likelihood of nuclear war, regardless of the intentions of the governments which possessed nuclear weapons. This claim of likelihood, at least in its strong version, came to be seen as exaggerated as the 1960s unfolded without nuclear conflict. CND still looms large in the consciousness of British anti-nuclear protest, but it was a movement that found little echo in America (other than in the unconscious appropriation of its symbol). There is an implication in *The Fate of the Earth*, which may dismay some British readers, that CND never happened: "only very recently have there been signs... that public opinion is stirring awake."

On the other hand the main argument against nuclear weapons advanced by Jonathan Schell was unfamiliar twenty or thirty years ago; indeed in its full detail it would have been unimaginable at that period. Environmentalism has intervened, with its attentiveness to a global picture, and to the interdependence of factors, physical and chemical, in the biological realm. The key notion in *The Fate of the Earth* is that the users and victims of nuclear weapons constitute a biological species which is dispersed on a worldwide scale and threatened by those weapons with extinction.

The argument can be stated as follows. The extinction of the human race would destroy all ideas of value, and hence we cannot even ask if it is right or wrong; it must be avoided at all costs. If there is any reason to think that a particular action will lead to human extinction it is a wrong action. A nuclear war that fully exploited current weapons resources might, on a certain scientific reasoning, have the associated effect of destroying all human life. Hence the possession of nuclear weapons is wrong.

There are several weaknesses in this chain of thought. Its first link is hard to assess, perhaps because it is intrinsically unclear. Mr Schell's favoured way of putting it is to draw a contrast between human extinction and individual death. We can assess whether an individual death is worth while; the grounds for such a judgment are not available if *everybody* dies. By this Schell means not only that moral arguments based on the consequences of a death for others are inapplicable but also, presumably, arguments based

on the happiness of the life that might be lived. But the latter could conceivably apply where the prospect is that of human extinction: we might judge that *no* human life is, or could be, happy enough to deserve protracting (for example, if most humans had been destroyed in a nuclear war and the remnant were all maimed and poisoned). Schell is not always consistent on this topic; he says in passing that "neither is there the commission of crimes in order to prevent extinction" which cannot be correct (and it is an important point) if extinction is an overriding consideration.

Does even a small probability that an action will lead to human extinction make it wrong? I would think not, if, for instance, this probability is known to be much smaller than the probability that mankind will be extinguished by a natural disaster. (It is a sign of Schell's honesty that he admits that nature can be this wanton: as far as we know, an event as calamitous as that which destroyed all species of large reptiles - a cometary impact, perhaps - must occur again and, like nuclear war, it may be only a few weeks away.) In any case the probability involved in Schell's argument is not a practical one, but the chance that a particular set of deductions is correct. He places great emphasis on the view that a nuclear war would deplete atmospheric ozone, which in turn would raise ultraviolet radiation to a lethal level.

Here, clearly, is an argument against nuclear weapons which could prove treacherous if it were generally embraced by the current protest movement. The mechanisms of ozone-depletion will certainly be well understood in due course. If they don't, justifiably Schell's prediction his argument is fatally weakened, just as the Cuban missile crisis and the peaceful 1960s weakened CND's case. Moreover, immediately, there are many scientists who do not accept nuclear war/ ozone loss/lethal radiation sequence, and we may be sure that the military planners will listen to them rather than to their opponents.

So *The Fate of the Earth* makes difficulties for itself by focusing stress on the notion of human extinction: the author leaves himself, for most of the book, without any other argument against nuclear weapons, so that, oddly, it is almost as if these weapons would be justified if their worst possible consequence were the destruction of civilization in the northern hemisphere. For the last step in his case - the conclusion that we should disarm - Schell does, however, broaden his argument. The third section of the book is a discussion of deterrence and its contradictions. But if global extinction is not invoked here, local extinction is. According to Schell, retaliation would be pointless because defence of an annihilated nation, and without the assurance of retaliation, deterrence cannot work. Nevertheless, by this argument, there must be a level of "mutual assured destruction" at which deterrence would cease to be contradictory.

In other words, much of the tendency of *The Fate of the Earth*, both here and in the discussion of general extinction, is favourable only to the idea of a reduction of nuclear arsenals, not to that of their abolition. And because of its honesty the book actually contains, by implication, an argument for the retention of limited nuclear resources. For Schell is quite aware that the abolition of nuclear weapons alone will not solve our problems, and he is prepared to urge the huge political innovation of world government, no less - that must accompany it. "Those who favour complete nuclear and conventional disarmament, as I do, [must] admit that their recommendation is inconsistent with national sovereignty." Given that conventional war only involves a weak element of deterrence, the implication is clear: non-nuclear conflict between a Russia and America disarmed of nuclear weapons can only confidently be averted if they abandon their national sovereignty. Faced with this choice between a horrible military possibility and a virtual political impossibility the

reader may feel that nuclear arsenals of a certain size are justified. Abolition may encourage conventional war, and this is a most serious reflection for any nuclear protestor.

Schell is not opposed to measures which will only restrict nuclear weapons, but they are, in his words, "aspirin" to bring down the patient's fever rather than the "surgery" which is required. European opponents of abolition, may not welcome this analogy. Every measure of control will improve our situation (and in any case abolition will surely be achieved step by step: aspirin in this instance being a necessary preliminary to surgery). It is not just because of America's different tactical predicament that this American study is all-or-nothing about nuclear arms, however. To start with, the environmentalism from which so much of its argument flows came to the fore, and is still most influential, in America. And there are traces of an American religious sensibility in *The Fate of the Earth*. For an author who is very careful with words Schell surprisingly often calls nuclear war "unthinkable" and "unimaginable". In fact he "thinks" this event vividly and persistently. Others have found the end of the world quite thinkable, even compulsively so, as well: there is now a phrase in America, "Armageddon freaks", which embraces every type of nihilist, religious and secular, while suggesting that all really belong in the first category. There is an unfortunate short section in *The Fate of the Earth* (pp 156-64) in which Schell ventures to attribute certain modern phenomena to the spirit of a nuclear age. The argument is unhistorical, but it is the choice of examples that really gives the game away. Non-productive sexuality and abstract art are picked out for special attention, and disapproval. We may think of the words of the prophet Jeremiah: "because of the abortions which ye have committed... is your land a desolation, and an inhabitant." But it would be quite misleading to press such comparisons. Schell's book has the elements, fleetingly, of an apocalyptic homily, but not the logic: no blame is being apportioned in this section for the advent of nuclear weapons. Indeed another honourable feature of the whole book is that there are no simple accusations of guilt. It contains, for instance, an extremely good account of the spirit of scientific enquiry: the reminder of the disparity "between the wishes of the scientist as a social being and the social results of his scientific findings", as exemplified above all by Einstein, is unflinching and salutary. Schell sees the technology of fission and fusion devices as an unavoidable step in the progress of natural science, and one which we should not reverse. For him this knowledge underpins our knowledge also of the possibility of our own extinction - is not just the reason for the renunciation of national sovereignty, but the guarantee that the new global politics will sustain itself: "all human beings would join in a defensive alliance, with nuclear weapons as their common enemy." If ever such a utopia came about it would surely require for its motivation something at least as powerful as the "emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and visceral understanding of the meaning of extinction" which this book tries very sincerely to communicate.

"Einstein and International Security" by Paul Doty and "Einstein and the Politics of Nuclear Weapons" are the two chapters that form the section on Einstein and the Nuclear Age in the volume based on papers delivered at the Jerusalem Einstein Centennial Symposium in June 1979 which has now been published under the title *Albert Einstein: Historical and Cultural Perspectives*, edited by Gerald Holton and Yehuda Elkana (200pp. Guildford: Princeton University Press, £26, 0 691 08299 5). Other sections cover Historical Perspectives on Einstein's Scientific Contributions, the Reception of Einstein's Scientific Ideas, his Impact on Scholarship and Twentieth-Century Culture, Einstein and Developments in the Jewish World and Working with Einstein: Reminiscences by Associates and Friends.



## Tilting at convents

Edward Norman

WALTER L. ARNSTEIN

Protestant versus Catholic in Mid-Victorian England: Mr Newdegate and the Nuns  
371pp. University of Missouri Press, distributed in the UK by International Book Distributors. £15. 08262 0354 X

The "No Popery" cry today is associated with fringe groups and eccentrics of the sort whose demonstrations during the recent Papal visit to England disclosed a lasting impression of shabbiness; so it is hard for us now to realize how central to Victorian culture anti-Catholicism was. It enjoyed a multi-class appeal. Public agitations against Catholics were easily contrived among the working classes, particularly in areas where there was competition for unskilled employment with the Irish immigrants. Among the intelligentsia, even among those most widely noted for their liberalism and progressive enlightenment, Catholicism was held to be contemptible because, in the words of Gladstone - it "enslaved the intellect". Gladstone's pamphlet against the Decrees of the Vatican Council, published in 1874, itself indicated the universality of the anti-Catholic culture: the essay was a classic of "No Popery" vituperation, distinguishable only by its erudite style from the popular literature of hatred.

Yet the attitude was not an absurd one. English national Protestantism was so linked in the public mind to the defence of personal freedom and constitutional liberty that the highly coloured rhetoric of the anti-Catholic tradition did not appear - as it must today - as a distasteful survival, but as an essential set of references for the preservation of civilizational identity. Hence the seriousness with which public men took "the Catholic question", and hence the opposition of so many to the Emancipation of the Catholics in 1829. It is important to realize that even those who led opinion in the Emancipation struggle - the reformers who sought to concede political rights to Catholics - held exactly the same horror of the religion as did their most die-hard opponents. They differed only over the expediency of concession. As the subject of this book, a die-hard on Catholic questions, remarked in 1864: "I believe that Protestant Christianity is the foundation of the constitution of this country and of the blessings it has conferred upon all classes, and I know that in consequence of the perpetual butting away of the legal safeguards of this great principle we are committed to a constant struggle with deadly adversaries."

The Catholics were actually victims of their own discretion. During the penal years of the eighteenth century they had established a tradition of partial withdrawal from public life, in order to avoid the occasion of attrition - to reduce the opportunities of causing offence to their Protestant neighbours by a social anonymity. Their withdrawal was never quite so complete as later interpreters of the penal code claimed; but Catholicism had, indeed, become a country-house and small-town religion, a resort, not to the ghetto, but to landed estates of a number of traditional families. But their very seclusion became suspect. The Victorian anti-Catholic tradition thrived on the supposition that Catholicism was secretive; that its practices were so shameful and so alien to the openness of Englishmen that its adherents purposefully lurked in the shadows and resided behind high walls.

The idea of what those practices were constituted the lord centre-piece of the tradition: at the political level Catholics were still regarded as a kind of "medievalism", at the social and religious level, they were regarded as hedged about by superstitious beliefs ("the water which is God", and so forth) and immersed in immoral conduct. "In books of all sizes, and from the pulpit of every Church," William Cobbett wrote in 1824, "we have been taught from our infancy that the beast, the man of sin, and the scelerate, mentioned in the Revelation,

were the names which God himself had given to the Pope." In such a climate of popular and intellectual assumptions it is a remarkable testimony to English political empiricism that concessions to the Catholics were made at all.

Walter L. Arnstein's book resurrects the memory of one of those who opposed them all. Charles Newdegate was a Warwickshire squire who represented his county in Parliament for forty-two years, from 1847. He was, even by the standards of the day, of extreme views on the Catholic question - or, at least, of extreme views in parliamentary terms. Actually he reflected very faithfully the general opinion of the country. After years of pressing forward a series of anti-Catholic measures he was successful, in 1870, in procuring the appointment of a Select Committee of the House of Commons into the conduct of Roman Catholic nunneries. The moment was right: opinion, stirred up by quite astonishing lies purveyed by the *Times* correspondent in Rome about the Vatican Council, then in session, was

ready to "liberate" the nuns from the servitude of the Catholic cloister.

Victorian anti-Catholicism had disclosed a suggestive preoccupation with nuns. In 1870, there were 216 convents in England. They were at least legal, since the provisions of the Catholic Emancipation Act, which outlawed monastic communities of men (but was never enforced), had not applied to them. But they remained a matter of unhealthy speculation and of what Professor Arnstein calls "the sexual concerns that lay behind the arguments of at least some of the proponents and opponents of convent regulation". Newdegate's hope was for a simple piece of state agency to monitor the goings-on in the convents and to throw them open to public inspection. Legislation to regulate or to abolish conventual institutions was very familiar in Catholic countries in the nineteenth century - in Spain, in the Italian Risorgimento and, above all, in Latin America. There, however, the state's interest was political and

economic: it had to do with the wealth and influence of the orders. In England, it was purely ideological: the public were concerned about the sinister life-style of the "unfortunate" ladies imprisoned behind the convent walls.

Arnstein does not set the English issue in this wider context, and his study might have profited from doing so. But his book in general is a model of its kind. It is entertainingly written, yet strictly academic in its use of source materials and interests. It never goes too far either way - to have been any longer would have been disproportionate to the importance of the subject; to have been shorter would have offered an inflated article. He correctly sees the serious side of the subject - and of Newdegate himself, who now emerges from the occasional side references in parliamentary and religious histories of the period, and is accorded a proper evaluation. His 1870 Select Committee was converted by others into a harmless inquiry into the state of the law on conventual

institutions - his life's work never issued in success. Yet he spoke for a serious aspect of the common assumptions of his contemporaries.

As a study of the penetration of religious issues into Victorian politics, this is a truly splendid addition to Professor Arnstein's own previous book on the Bradlaugh question. As a careful revelation of an interesting aspect of Victorian popular culture, the book serves a secondary purpose which many will value. The force and pervasiveness of the "No Popery" tradition surprised foreigners who visited England in the last century. When Blessed Dominic Barberi, the Passionist, arrived in 1840, he was astonished to discover feelings so much more inflamed than he had imagined. All the way from Folkestone to London, he saw effigies of the Pope burned amidst scenes of popular enthusiasm. But he was unaware that the Fifth of November, the date of his arrival, was in some degree exceptional. Some things were not quite so bad as they seemed.

## Maxims and victims

P. J. Marshall

V. G. KIERNAN

European Empires from Conquest to Collapse, 1815-1960  
285pp. Fontana. £2.95. 0 00 63482 2

V. G. Kiernan's latest book explores an aspect of the history of European expansion which, for all its fascination for ordinary readers, attracts relatively little scholarly attention: the use of force by the European powers. In an impressively wide sweep over the Americas, Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Kiernan catalogues the activities of the Spanish, the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French, the Russians, the British and the Germans, abundantly demonstrating the violent nature of much of Europe's contact with the rest of the world over the past 150 years.

Comfortable assumptions about the application of minimum force with clinical precision are easily dispelled. In European terms the forces deployed were no doubt often on a very small scale, but the consequences of such operations for indigenous societies could be catastrophic. Kiernan repeatedly notes the terrible disproportion in casualties between the combatants: European forces relatively unscathed, their opponents severely mauled. The conquering armies required massive trains of porters who were very vulnerable to disease. Conquest was often followed by a long period of "pacification" marked by officially approved exemplary punishment for the recalcitrant and much unofficial pillage and retribution. Kiernan would no doubt endorse the conclusion of H. L.

Wesseling (in a recent issue of *Itinerario* from the Leiden Centre for the History of European Expansion), that the term "small war" can be a particularly misleading euphemism. From the non-European point of view, such conflicts were, Wesseling writes, "real wars comparable in intensity and magnitude with many of the major wars in European history".

Kiernan chronicles these wars with attractively even-handed compassion. His sympathies are of course rationally on the side of the victims. For instance, he describes the Moplahs of southern India as "a poor peasant people . . . Providence had created them, or so that second providence the British Raj assumed, to be exploited by landlords and traders . . . They were always beaten down, and left more darkly and furiously religious." But Kiernan can also sympathize with the European soldiers, their ranks remorselessly thinned by disease and inevitably seeking oblivion in drink, and even the pack-animals which "suffered and perished in untold numbers in every campaign". The latter-day conquistadors, men such as Bugeaud, Grabbe, Kitchener or Roberts, are not figures whom Kiernan finds congenial, but he can accept that the builders of empire "display frequent gallantry, heroic devotion to duty, as well as much else".

It would be easy enough to treat this book simply as a narrative of violence and suffering which, deplorable as it no doubt was, lay outside the mainstream of European history and is now happily at an end. Taking such a view, the present-day reader can indulge himself in frissons of horror as well as in comforting reflections on his superiority over an unrepresentative segment of his ancestors. To read the book in this way would, however, be to

mistake its purpose. It is a contribution to a new series called the "History of War and European Society", whose aim is to investigate "the relationships and interactions" between society as a whole and war, and armed forces. Kiernan postulates a number of connections between the European past and colonial wars and colonial armies, and he suggests that they may still be casting their shadow over the European present and even over the future.

His analysis of such connections is for the most part cautious and tentative. The colonial armies neither simply reproduced the outlook of contemporary Europe, nor on the other hand were they totally alien bodies bringing their own doctrines back to infect Europe. The truth, Kiernan appears to be arguing, lies somewhere in between. The imperial frontier attracted certain elements of the European upper classes and fortified their tendencies to authoritarianism and to militarism. Whether such tendencies nurtured overseas then gained a firmer hold on Europe itself seems to have depended on the vitality shown by other political traditions in particular countries. Although they could be influential in Irish history, proconsuls were generally kept under control in Britain. In Spain, however, colonial soldiers got disastrously out of hand and, in Kiernan's view, they exercised a malign influence at certain points of French history. Algeria was of course crucial in the fall of the Fourth Republic but Kiernan believes that it had "an important bearing on the rise of Bonapartism, that precursor of fascism".

Colonial warfare had a context not just in European society but also in the societies brought into conflict with

Europe. Here again Kiernan raises interesting questions. Why were small European forces so often successful against such apparently hopeless odds? He insists that technical advantages were only of major significance late in his period. Europeans did not gain overwhelming superiority of firepower until the deployment of Maxim and machine-guns towards the end of the nineteenth century. Paradoxically the technological gap was perhaps at its widest in Europe's favour in the very last years of the empires, when airborne weapons were unleashed in ways that Kiernan describes with mordant distaste. When they were making their most spectacular conquests before the 1880s, the European armies placed their confidence in that most unsophisticated of weapons, the bayonet. Thus Europe's advantage lay in organization, morale and élan, rather than in technical superiority.

From the apparent failure of non-European societies to match European determination and power of organization, Kiernan draws conclusions which are controversial. He appears to believe that effective resistance to Europeans could only come ultimately from mass popular movements inspired by ideals of nationalism and above all of social transformation. He is inclined to disparage movements defending the "traditional" values. "Mahdism contained no message of social liberation" and therefore could not win the support of the Egyptian peasantry. Even after 1918 "there was only too much danger" that the opponents of colonial régimes would "relapse into atavistic forms of struggle, especially where religion was still predominant". The nature of "resistance" to foreign rule in Africa or Asia has in recent years generated a considerable body of writing. Most of those who have contributed to it would probably not accept the apparently rigid distinction between "traditional" and "modern" which Kiernan seems to be offering, arguing instead that "traditional" and "modern" overlap or run parallel in many cases. Japan is an obvious exception to his scheme of things. In this book it changes its role from being a victim of imperialism into being one of "the new imperialists outside Europe" without any obvious explanation.

So insistent is Kiernan on the incapacity of the old order in Asia and Africa and on the need for a total transformation that he gives colonial conquest credit "in a roundabout way" for preparing the non-European world's "eventual liberation which had to begin with liberation from a great part of its past". Bleak and doctrinaire as this statement may seem to be, it is derived, like the rest of the book, from a sense of outraged humanity: "the total of deaths inflicted on Afro-Asia by Europe must have been trifling compared with the number inflicted on it by its own rulers".

## Wind

This is the wind, the wind in a field of corn.  
Great crowds are fleeing from a major disaster  
Down the long valleys, the green swaying wadis,  
Down through the beautiful catastrophe of wind.

Families, tribes, nations and their livestock  
Have heard something, seen something. An expectation  
Of a gigantic misunderstanding has swept over the hilltop  
Bending the ear of the hedgerow with stories of fire and sword.

I saw a thousand years pass in two seconds.  
Land was lost, languages rose and divided.  
This land went east and found safety.  
His brother sought Africa and a dish of aloes.

Centuries, minutes later, one would ask:  
How the hit of a sword wandered so far from the smithy.  
And somewhere they will sing: "Like chaff we were borne  
In the wind." This is the wind in a field of corn.

James Fenton

# Through the glass of introspection

Mary Jacobus

MICHAEL MILLGATE

Thomas Hardy: A Biography

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Hardy seems to become himself only when the O.M. of his Order of Merit (he annoyed his first wife by refusing a knighthood) comes to stand for the Old Man of Max Gate. Photographs of the young Hardy - the "ill-grown, under-sized young architect" whose literary ambitions Emma later claimed to have encouraged - make him look as outwardly nondescript as the nameless "man/so commonplace" ("I have Lived with Shades") whom the older Hardy feared to recognize as himself. Old age brought the distinctive hawkish look of the Augustus John drawing; in its more benign manifestations, this was the look of an elderly solicitor or the country architect he said he would like to have been if he could have had his life over again. But Hardy, like Little Father Time, was old in his looks and thoughts long before then. When the journalist Henry Nevinson saw him in his sixties, he seemed already on the way to death: "Face a peculiar grey-white like an invalid's or one soon to die . . . much wrinkled - sad wrinkles, thoughtful and pathetic, but none of the power of rage or active courage. Eyes bluish grey and growing a little white with age . . . Characteristically, Hardy himself entered into the spirit of the thing; told that Jacques-Emile Blanche had portrayed him as ten years more in the decrepitude than he was, he merely commented: 'time will cure that fault'."

Hardy outlived himself again and again, as the volumes of poetry succeeded one another, each concluding with his epitaph. Posthumousness became his speciality, making him at once ghostly and self-immortalizing. "For my part", he wrote (aged forty-eight), "if there is any way of getting a melancholy satisfaction out of life it lies in dying, so to speak, before one is out of the flesh." The famous Max Gate pyres of the later years - designed, like the ghost-written *Life*, to cover his traces - betray one aspect of that melancholy satisfaction: inaccessibility. Stealing a march on his biographers, Hardy objectified himself in the impersonal narrative dictated to his second wife. Viewers of his corpse saw a "triumphant look on his face"; perhaps he wrote (aged forty-eight), "if there is any way of getting a melancholy satisfaction out of life it lies in dying, so to speak, before one is out of the flesh." 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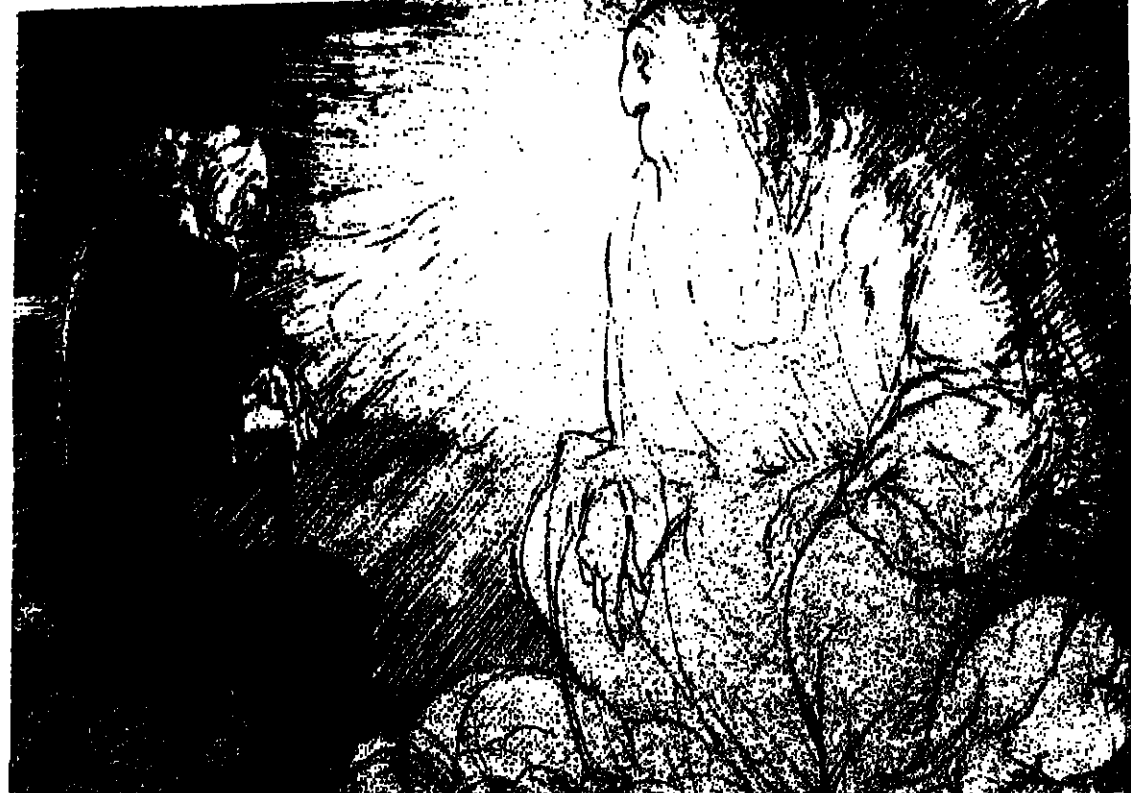


the women who attracted him were of higher social class, most were married. For whatever reason, early engagements like that during the 1860s to Eliza Nicholls, a ladies' maid, came to nothing. As Millgate sees it, the tragedy of Hardy's marriage to Emma — she, presumably, as anxious to escape from a remote Cornish vicarage as he from his architect's office — was its failure to satisfy him either physically or imaginatively. But Hardy's self-questioning may be the best diagnosis: "real woman is abhorrent to man? hence the failure of matrimony?"

With her snobberies, girlishness, and vociferous complaints about her husband, Emma was "real" all right. But though judged to be "a great bore" by most people who knew her, she was also capable of inspiring genuine affection, and her scatty rambunctiousness — a fearless if accident-prone cyclist in her later years, she also became an enthusiastic feminist — made her, in Hardy's own words, "so living" (especially by contrast to the dreary docility, melancholia and ill-health of his second wife). That, perhaps, was the trouble. Hardy clearly preferred his women dead. The idealized well-beloveds of his poetry and prose — spurned when alive, mourned when lost — are his muses. Without them, his domestic life might have been happier, but his imaginative life would have been poorer, and his best poetry unwritten. We don't read the poems, after all, for their jaundiced views on matrimony, but for their tribute to *Veens vestige flammée*. Hardy was clearly not an easy man to live with, and — especially as time went by — he was capable of being irritable, tight-fisted and over-sensitive to his critics. Visiting him in the 1890s, George Gissing found him a restless man married to a discontented woman, and concluded that "his own home is not the best place for getting to know him". Twenty years later, Charles Morgan found him equally hard to know away from home, ready in his self-protectively "ordinary" demeanour "a concealment of extraordinary fires". The lesson for Hardy's biographers

may be that the "real" is a spectre, the hidden fires certainly not those of home and hearth, or even of family tradition, but rather of an imaginatively recreated past. One might speculate, in fact, that it was precisely the separation of life and art that enabled Hardy to be so successful an imaginative self-survivor.

Nevinson tells an anecdote of Hardy in his sixties, alarmed at the prospect of going to a Lyons teashop, "being used only to an ABC", yet riveted by a newspaper placard announcing "Family Murdered with a Penknife" ("The vision of the penknife seemed to fascinate him"). Horace Moule, Hardy's alcoholic, suicidal, possibly homosexual mentor and friend, presents just such a split between gentility and violence, the world of the vicarage and its debauched anti-type. Millgate argues convincingly that Hardy's outwardly conventional life was one of intense creative preoccupation, his apparent meekness the mask of artistic ruthlessness. Yet at the same time he claims that "his richest narrative material is worked more or less directly from life", seeing a novel like *The Return of the Native*, while not exactly a *roman à clef*, as deeply autobiographical in the dilemma it explores. Here, however, one wants to ask not what Hardy drew on from the rich accretion of personal, family and local detail evoked by Millgate, but rather: how did his novels write the "Life" that Hardy himself was so reticent about? To find in *The Well-Beloved* a prophetic account of Hardy's later grief and remorse at Emma's death, or to turn from the elegies of 1912-13 to *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, the novel of his Cornish courtship forty years before, is to be struck by the way that re-writing and pre-writing can amount to the same thing. Time is trickier in Hardy than in most writers. Bound not only by the demands of chronological sequence but also by the repetitiveness of the later years, Millgate's narrative has to ignore other kinds of compulsion and repetition. Hardy's alternative title for *Moments of Vision*, "Moments from the years", points to a different experience of



"But Mr Hardy, Mr Hardy, if you only knew all the circumstances", a cartoon by Will Dyson, reproduced from the book reviewed here.

time, like his self-proclaimed "faculty... for burying an emotion in [his] heart or brain for forty years, and exhuming it at the end of that time as fresh as when interred". Yet Hardy could also experience himself as a weary and repetitive illusion, his identity endlessly forestalled by the ancestors of "The Peddler" while all the time thinking, "I am I, And What I do I do myself alone."

Hardy knew that a carpet yields many patterns ("As, in looking at a carpet, by following one colour a certain pattern is suggested, by following another colour, another; so in life the seer should watch that pattern among general things which his idiosyncrasy moves him to observe...").

If Millgate's carpet sometimes looks like a heart-rug, that isn't to say that Hardy didn't have one, and his domestic pets as well. What we miss is the seer's own idiosyncrasy — the pattern of an imagination capable of scrutinizing, as in "Wessex Heights", the discontinuities separating "my simple self that was" from "such a strange continuator as this, / Who yet has something in common with himself, my chrysalis." Out of the gap between a simplified self in the past and the complex identity of the estranged modern writer comes the writing. If "Wessex" is the name for a fictional space inhabited by the novels, "Wessex Heights" is the name for the solitude inhabited by a writer who

needed to shed his life as well as live in the past. Millgate sees the *Life* as a way of projecting into the future the protection which Hardy had tried to give both to the sources of his inspiration and to his innermost self. Heavy as it is with personal allusions, "Wessex Heights" could be read as a poem designed to lure on the biographer and then leave him in a place where biography itself can be eluded — "Where men have never cared to haunt, nor women have walked with me, / And ghosts then keep their distance; and I know some liberty." For all its comprehensiveness, Michael Millgate's biography is comprehending enough to let Hardy escape, or at least take refuge in his writing.

## Missing women

Angela Leighton

PENNY BOUMELHA

*Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form*  
178pp. Brighton: Harvester, £18.95.  
0 7108 0018 5

Hardy's creative career was notoriously susceptible to the influence of women. In both his life and his writing he was haunted by the presence of the women he desired to have loved. But he was also living and writing at a time when the nature of woman was a subject of new enquiry and debate. If Hardy's work contains a rich and rewarding nostalgia for the particular woman much missed, it also shows a commitment to the public controversy over the ideological and social status of woman in the last decades of the nineteenth century. In her book *Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form*, Penny Boumelha skirts the large area of biographical interest in Hardy, and deals instead with his fictional women in relation to the prevailing ideology of woman in writings of the time. She takes her stand in a line of feminist criticism which has been well marked out by, among others, Elaine Showalter, Patricia Stubbs and Mary Jacobus.

The aim of the book is not, however, to range Hardy's novels on one side or the other of the New Women dispute, but rather to show them "in conscious dialogue with both feminist and anti-feminist fiction" of the time. According to Boumelha, this dialogue takes place not through the social themes of the novels but through their narrative form. She argues that Hardy's ideological contentiousness and self-questioning become apparent in the novels' uneasy shifts between pastoral, ironic, realist and tragic modes of writing. Narrative form, therefore, serves both to display and to disrupt sexual ideology.

Penny Boumelha's approach is both historically informed and original in its interpretations. A detailed and

scholarly survey of popular fiction in the late nineteenth century provides the literary context for Hardy's own fiction, which is then assessed in a slightly different register. Here Boumelha discusses "the formal dislocations and discontinuities" of the narrative, especially in its portrayal of women. Many of the heroines, she argues, resist ideological control by author and reader, because they slip through the interstices, as it were, of Hardy's narrative forms.

This approach to the novels is at once fascinating and problematic. Boumelha's method seeks to link two aspects of Hardy which are not obviously connected: Hardy, the conscious exponent and questioner of contemporary views on Hardy, the male author of female characters. That she is herself aware of the discrepancy between the two is evident in the large questions she raises in the introduction: "What, first, is the relationship between the women that we are, and the woman-as-sign that figures in the novels?" and, even more ambitiously, "How is it that 'received assumptions' and 'contemporary belief' enter into works of fiction?" Boumelha does not so much answer these questions in her book as ably, uncertainly, between the two critical methods they imply: between a discussion of the social position of women in the nineteenth century and an interpretation of Hardy's heroines as imaginative and ideological creations. The relation between social documentation and theoretical analysis of fiction comes to seem peculiarly hazardous.

It is in Boumelha's analysis of the female characters that this difficulty looms large. In seeking to show that Hardy's portrayal of Eustacia Vye, for instance, or of Sue Bridehead, is free from a limiting ideology of woman, she dwells on the uneven registers and uneasy distancing devices of Hardy's narratives. This technical awkwardness then serves to support a view of the heroines as disruptively complex and strange. The contradictions and capriciousness of Sue, for instance, become an expression of her refusal to be erotically framed, either by Jude or

Hardy. Her elusiveness and complexity are seen as a form of resistance to ideological appropriation by men. Sue's consciousness is opaque, filtered as it is through the interpretations of Jude, with all their attendant incomprehensions and distortions. However, it could be argued, against Boumelha, that Sue's sexual elusiveness, as it is distanced through the mediating and faulty understanding of Jude, still only signposts the distance of Hardy's own desire. His portrayal of Sue, for all its unaccompanied male mediations, may still confirm a sexual ideology of woman which is infinitely appropriate. Like the ghosts of Hardy's other loved women, Sue might only escape narrative definition because she can sustain a desire, both erotic and imaginative, which is unfulfilling because unfulfilled.

The basis of Boumelha's theoretical analysis of Hardy's women lies in this view of the relation between male author and female character as a relation of subject and sexual object. She follows Mary Jacobus in elaborating Hardy's techniques of verbal pursuit and penetration of "sex" and shows how this kind of erotic handling makes Tess "not merely spoken for" by the narrator, but also spoken for. Tess is too often the unconscious and desirable object of the author's and reader's gaze. Sue, on the other hand, remains at a more insurmountable distance, and is thus resistant to appropriation by the male "narrator".

This is where the main force and direction of the book are to be found, but it is also where it disappoints. Boumelha's all too conscientious awareness of sources and critical precursors sometimes leads her into repetitiveness, and in the end I feel she does not ground her own literary practice in any answerable theory. The important questions she raises at the start seem to remain unresolved. Nonetheless, this is a stirring and ambitious book. If it does not always fulfil its theoretical aims, for that very reason it inspires argument, interest and dissent.

## Lost father

Andrew Motion

MYFANWY THOMAS

*One of These Fine Days: Memoirs*  
168pp. Carcanet New Press with Mid-Northumberland Arts Group. £6.95.  
0 85635 387 6

Myfanwy Thomas was only six when her father Edward was killed in the battle of Arras in 1917. She was the youngest of three children: Merlyn, the first-born, has a special place in the family's affections in spite of occasional turbulence, and Bronwen was her father's consistently indulged favourite. But Myfanwy was less confident of his good opinion. "For most of my life", she says in *One of These Fine Days*, "I have felt that he did not care for me." Her reasons were unfounded but sympathetic: "I had always rather resented the poem he had written for me ('What shall I give'); it perpetuated what I longed to be without — my spectacles, my straight hair, my acquiescence." Over the years, though, those uncertainties have faded — because they have been absorbed by natural processes of self-discovery, and in poetic terms because she has come to appreciate herself as "part of my father's own unique creation". Her unostentatious relishings of the knowledge that she provided the initial promptings for "The Galleys" and "Out in the Dark" and that she is preserved as the child who paddles in "The Brook" and who picks the herb in "Old Man", make her memoir read like the resolution of a misunderstanding which, if never very acute, has always nagged her. It is done tactfully and self-deprecatingly, gives way to pleasure that her father's poetic achievement is now widely appreciated. Anyone who has worked on Edward Thomas will know how very much her generosity with time, books and advice has helped to bring this about.

By her own admission, Myfanwy Thomas's poor eyesight has been an embarrassment or irritation to her throughout her life. So it is hardly surprising that her prose should be alert to the ways in which it looks at things. Appropriately, there is a good deal of close-up (sitting on her father's knee she could "admire his curling hair, and catch a glimpse of his gold tooth"), and a proper exploitation of a child's-eye view. When she first heard a gramophone, for instance: "I would peer up through the wooden louvres when the two doors were opened and fancy I caught a swirl of a filly petticoat or the ghost of a white evening shirt-front." Scenes such as these are occasions for the book's imaginative pace to quicken — and its most factually interesting moments are almost all memories of her father or adult appreciations of his work, for example, the placing of various poems, for example, and the emphasis on his familiarity with and debt to folk songs. But by far the most heart-felt passages all concentrate on her mother, Helen.

Helen Thomas's struggle to cope with her family and her sorrow after her husband's death dominates the book. She made courageous attempts to occupy herself but her loss always threatened to overwhelm her. Writing to a friend in 1924 she said "grief and despair and loneliness swept over my soul again and again, leaving it shrunken, and my life so dependent on my affections has had nothing to cling to, but has been lost and wandering. Accurately, she diagnosed her suffering as stemming from the virtually complete self-surrender she had made in the past: "always I need and long for my lover to whom I gave my whole being, and in giving myself possessed myself as I can never do again." To a certain extent, her grief was assuaged by the writing of *As It Was and For All That Without End*. These two books, for all their purple patches, remain extraordinarily powerful. Myfanwy Thomas's memoir deliberately avoids comparisons by striking a much more modest register, but it nevertheless makes a touching and charming companion to them.

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## At the mercy of demons

Clive Sinclair

ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER

*The Collected Stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer*  
610pp. Cape. £10.50.  
0 224 02024 2

One day, while feeding pigeons, Isaac Bashevis Singer was filmed by an NBC TV crew who knew him not. He was subsequently presented to the public as a lonely greybeard, a cause for concern whose only friends were feathered. Let them read his *Collected Stories* and they will quickly learn that the devil around him is filled with angels, devils and other invisibles, just as a drop of water teems with microbes. A Yiddish writer, Singer's fictional shadow, also nourishes Broadway's pigeons in "The Psychic Journey". Here he meets a Hungarian witch named Margaret Fagazy, who has visited the writer's apartment in astral form. "You know my address?" he enquires. "The astral body has no need of addresses!" she replies. It appears that she also knows his telephone number, because she later calls him with a proposition which he accepts against his will. In short, they travel to Israel together as tour guides; he lecturing on the cabala, she revealing the mysteries of (among other things) "the delta of the brain waves and the resonance of the cybernetic evocations". The tour breaks up on Yom Kippur, whereupon our hero and heroine are trapped by the Egyptian and Syrian invasions (the year being 1973). Margaret regards this as a punishment visited upon the writer for his refusal to unite with her, body and soul.

They are still arguing when my phone rings. It is a colleague from the *Jewish Chronicle* who wants me to go to Israel the day after tomorrow to interview Singer, presently guest of honour at a Drama Festival in Tel Aviv. Immediately I commence a psychic journey of my own; I imagine the sensuous luxury of a distant hotel, the dangerous embrace of a dusky actress. I invent a series of questions that will force the sorcerer to disclose his secrets to this apprentice. In the meantime I return to Singer's story, half-expecting to find myself enmeshed in the plot; perhaps the Houdini-like writer will escape the bewitching Hungarian by sacrificing an innocent interviewer. In fact Margaret flees the hostilities, leaving the writer to return to the United States at his leisure. There he is reunited with Dora, whose own pilgrimage led her estranged lover from the pigeons to Margaret and thence to the Promised Land. They are strolling down Amsterdam Avenue when a leaflet advertising Madame Fagazy's psychic powers is thrust at them. Without knowing why the writer confesses that he "flew with her to Jerusalem". Dora, associating the word *flew* with broomsticks, doesn't believe him, and suggests they go home "by subway, not by psychic journey".

The reality of the writer's expedition, and of the whole story, is now in question. Because he didn't bump into Dora (staying on a nearby street) it was as if they existed in parallel worlds. This is the wonder of Singer's prose; like a juggler, he can deal with many spheres simultaneously. So there actually are two Isaacs in "The Psychic Journey": that conjured up by Margaret, and that visited by Dora. Yet Singer is a realistic writer, for our world is an uncertain place; its foundations are as mysterious as its motivations. Gimpel, at the conclusion of another story, awaits the hereafter joyfully, aware that whatever may be there "will be real, without complication, without ridicule, without deception. God be praised: there, even Gimpel cannot be deceived."

Until that moment, however, we are all denizens of this deceivers' paradise. My friend at the *Jewish Chronicle* calls me back. "You won't be going to Israel?" he says. "Singer has cancelled his trip. Security reasons."

Actually, the last time I saw Singer was about a year ago. He was reading at Frank Lloyd Wright's Marjorie and Edgar Auditorium, just over the Golden Gate Bridge, one great American eccentric standing on a stage designed by another. He looked frail, but went strong for ninety minutes.

Finally he played shuttlecock with questions thrown at him by the audience. He watched them float towards him, and then with a masterly stroke hit them out of sight. "Mr Singer, do you expect to see the Messiah?" "I hope," he replied. "Like the people of Chelm. In Chelm a man is employed to welcome the Messiah. It is not well-paid, but it is steady employment." "Mr Singer, are your writings autobiographical?" He spoke of a man who visits Lublin and always tells lies on his return. "Why go to Lublin?" his listeners ask. "Why not make up lies at home and save the fare?" "If I didn't go to Lublin," replies the man, "I might tell the truth by accident." "As a writer I must also go to Lublin," said Singer. Beside me sat a girl with a battered boater and a dirty white macintosh on her lap, garments instantly recognizable as Singer's *shmatas*. This was his secretary, whom I had previously encountered. She took me backstage to meet Singer. "You've lost weight," he said. "Only

good stories come from the mouths of liars. Singer is therefore torn between what he knows to be true, and what he knows as an artist. The latter knowledge comes from the forbidden fruit. Singer uses the cabalistic concept of *tzimtzum* to account for this dichotomy. According to *tzimtzum* God had to dim his light to create the world, which otherwise would have been burnt to a frazzle by His effulgence. In crept the devil amid the shadows. Likewise in these stories: without the devil and his lies they wouldn't exist.

Gimpel the Fool, Singer's sweetest character, is so called because he believes everything people tell him. He is gulled so mercilessly by his neighbours that he complains to his wife, better to be a fool all your days than for one hour to be evil. You are not a fool. They are the fools. Gimpel is wholly good. Unlike his creator he is prepared to accept the



Juli Polonois and Femme Juive Polonoise, 1765, reproduced from A Jewish Iconography, supplementary volume, by Alfred Rubens (128pp. Nonpareil, Albany House, Petty France, London SW1. £19. 0 907940 00 5).

consequences of his own actions as well as those of his dependants. "What's one to do? Shoulders are from God, and burdens too." This is just as well since Gimpel is also deceived by Elka, his wife, who presents him with six bastards. She confesses on her deathbed, and departs with a smile on her lips. Gimpel interprets this as, "I deceived Gimpel. That was the meaning of my brief life." Exactly. It is a smile of triumph, the smile of a successful artist. Elka's machinations provide Gimpel the Fool with a metaphor for Singer himself. But Singer is more than a prankster; his fictions may be lies but their subject is truth. He acts the devil, but he wants us to think of God.

After Elka's sensational demise Gimpel is tempted by the devil, who announces that there is no God and no world to come. So what is there? "A thick mire." Persuaded, Gimpel sins, but is redeemed by his faithless wife. "You fool! Because I was false I everything false too? I never deceived anyone but myself. I'm paying for it all, Gimpel. They spare you nothing here." Inspired by a repentant she-devil Gimpel leaves Framopol for the world, where he becomes a storyteller, deciding there "was really no lie. Whatever doesn't really happen is dreamed at night. It happens to one if it doesn't happen to another, tomorrow if not today, or a century hence if not next year." This is a neat resolution of Singer's little paradox, but it takes no account of the fact that convert from good to bad (from saved to damned).

Gimpel is luckier than Akiba, heroine of "A Crown of Feathers". An educated, independent girl — an exception among the *shetlachs* — she finds fault with all her suitors. Eventually the false ghost of her grandmother persuades her to convert, despite the better advice of her grandfather's advice. Poor girl, how could she know which was telling the truth? She believed her grandmother

because of a crown made of feathers topped off with a cross, but as she lay dying she saw another feathery crown with God's name in Hebrew at its summit. Which revelation was the real one? Or was the devil right when he told her, "The truth is that there is no truth?" Singer isn't saying. He concludes the story with the words, "if there is such a thing as truth it is as intricate and hidden as a crown of feathers". If this collection has a flaw (and no book dares to be perfect) it is Singer's occasional habit of ignoring his own advice — beautifully exemplified above — to stick to images, which have the priceless virtue of being both precise and enigmatic. He is capable of translating the same sentiments into more portentous (and less memorable) prose. For example, these musings from "A Day in Coney Island":

I closed my eyes and determined once and forever to break through the fence between idea and being, the categories of pure reason and the thing in itself... I felt, almost palpably, that I was one step from truth. Time is nothing, space is nothing, I murmured. But that nothingness is the background of the world picture. Then what is the world picture? Is it matter? Spirit? Is it magnetism or gravitation? And what is life? What is suffering? What is consciousness? And if there is a God, what is He?

Et cetera. The narrator, having no answers, decides he may as well seek the truth in bed. Singer's real strength lies less to do with how people think than with how they behave.

If "Gimpel the Fool" is seen as a parable of how a man becomes a writer, then "The Little Shoemakers" is the story of Polish Jewry (as well as of its most famous chronicler). It is all there: the centuries of Jewish life in Poland, the enlightenment, emigration to America, the holocaust, the immortal traditions. Having survived the Nazis, Abba Shauler the shoemaker is reunited with his Americanized sons in New Jersey. There, to his astonishment, he finds that though successful they have "not forgotten their heritage, nor had they lost themselves among the unworthy". Finally they stand together at the workbench, practicing their craft with ancient tools.

But make no mistake, Singer is no sentimentalist. On the contrary, he has dissected himself from that part of the Yiddish tradition that wallows in *shmatas*. His vision is unmerciful; there is no salvation for beautiful, brainy Akiba, who would have done better to have stifled her ambitions and submitted to being a battered bride. As he says in one of these stories, if you do A then B will follow. His devils know how easy it is to persuade their victims to take the first step. The logic is inexorable: one mistake and damnation is inevitable. It is unnecessary to enquire whether Singer actually believes in his goblins (he will really "let" them) or whether indigenous inhabitants of his stories (not of this world, then of a parallel one he has created. It must be stressed, also, that it is a recognizable world; the location may be Warsaw or the Lower East Side, but the temptations are universal. Like the little shoemakers he has access to arcane wisdom, but his sensibilities are modern.

Although he may blame dybbuks for his own verbal excesses, and demons are responsible for many damnations, Singer is well aware that human nature needs no evil counsel to misbehave. So much so that the narrator of "The Last Demon" is made redundant. "Why demons, when man himself is a demon? Why persuade to evil someone who is already convinced?" His station is post-holocaust Poland, rich in the consciousness of sub-conscious. Singer's subject is the eternal battle between self-realization and responsibility. He has followed his craft into heretical regions, yet he has never ignored his responsibility to his religion (nor his debt to his parents). He is guilty of betraying Israel, but not of abandoning her. Therefore his tongue stays free, nor has his right hand forgotten its cunning. In fact these forty-seven stories are a modern testament.

## Cornell

In December of 1979, Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan, capturing the previously obscure central Asian country in headlines around the world. Now, more than two years later, there are still many questions about the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. Written to give the general reader an up-to-date account of developments in Afghanistan, *The Struggle for Afghanistan* brings one closer to the people caught in this complicated situation.

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## Secrets of the centrales

Michael Ignatieff

PATRICIA O'BRIEN

**The Promise of Punishment: Prisons in Nineteenth-Century France**  
330pp. Guildford: Princeton University Press, £21.42.  
0 691 65339 1

The cell-blocks of the great nineteenth-century European penitentiaries only felt alive when the coffin of authority was heard to approach. In anticipation of the warden's flickering eye in the inspection slit in the cell-door, poses of diligence and submission were taken up. But once the steps could be heard receding down the corridor, the poses were thrown off and the hum of prison language would start up again: the prisoners' semaphoric tapped out on the ducts and heating-pipes, the messages whispered to ears glued to the other side of the cell wall; the obscene and longwinded jokes scratched on stone, chapel stalls, shop tiles. Even under the direct gaze of wardens sitting on their high chairs in the workshops, prisoners picking oakum quickly mastered the ventriloquist's art to keep the hidden circuitry of language humming.

Patricia O'Brien's ear is keenly attuned to this secret speech. She has recovered snatches of the "corporate argot" of the nineteenth-century confined; searched the picture files for drawings of the graffiti on prison walls; combed the departmental archives and found a treasure — the love letters, or *létions*, which inmates wrote to each other in one late nineteenth-century women's institution. One woman wrote, "You will be like my child. I cherish you and love you as a daughter. I would like to hold you close to me," signing herself poignantly "ton amie dévouée". Another assures her lover, "I am your legitimate wife for ever," while a third day-dreams that when she is rich again she will build a palace, rid it of all men and fill it with women married to each other. The palace of her fantasy, O'Brien points out, has a prison's walls.

The language of love was whispered throughout the nineteenth-century prison, "in the workshop, in passage from one place to another, under the stairs, in the refectory (during reading periods and on days of bad weather), in the dormitory, in a word, everywhere". How deaf, then, are the historians who have taken the near silence of the official reports on the subject of homosexuality as the truth.

For women, O'Brien argues, love in prison was expressed in the vernacular of the mother-daughter ideal. It was a language affirming companionship and protection against the weight of the walls and the discipline. In men's prisons, there were these affirmations too, but also the entanglement of love with trade and power. In the hidden economy of the prison exchange system, the bodies of the young boys, the *grands* or *petits Jésus* as they were mockingly called, were used as objects of commerce, purchased by the muscular or powerful in return for cigarettes, squares of chocolate or a few grams of illicit alcohol. This, of course, is how it is today. What is different historically is not the practice, but the official discourse which consigned the practice to near silence in the reports.

The secret language of desire in prison was written everywhere, even on the bodies of the prisoners. In the text there is reproduced an etching of the tattooed torso of a twenty-eight-year old male prisoner from the *centrale* in Mmes sometime in the 1890s. This torso speaks. Over the left breast is a tattooed decoration for valor; on the right biceps a full-length portrait of Napoleon; on the right shoulder a depiction of *La République* herself, coupled with Phrygian bonnet; on his left rib-cage a lady of pleasure awaits the prisoner at a fountain, while on his right rib-cage, another lady beckons to him from a darkened doorway. In the middle of his stomach, the prisoner has had inscribed the central image of anticipated bliss: a portrait of himself seated in a hot tub. He is smiling broadly above the steam.

These tattoos as O'Brien points out, are a vernacular of longing, a representation of the desires denied by confinement, but also a declaration of personal identity. In choosing the painful inscription of their fantasies at the point of a needle, a prisoner was marking his body as his own and thus refusing the nameless fate of the prison number. He knew the price of such an identity would be high. Tattoos were the first thing policemen looked for when seeking to identify suspects as recidivists. There were even registers of tattoos and other distinguishing marks to assist in directing the full force of the law at repeat offenders. Yet those who had tattooed themselves clearly preferred being named to namelessness.

It is O'Brien's attentiveness to these hidden vernaculars of identity, desire and defiance which sets her social

history of the nineteenth-century prison apart from its predecessors. Michel Foucault seems to have heard only the monotonous football of the wardens in the corridors. She has heard the brimming speech behind the cell doors.

She has also tried to link the history of the prison to the political and social transformation of the society beyond the walls. She offers nothing to match the sweep and power of Foucault's generalizations, but she does succeed in tying the periodicity of prison history to the great landmarks of political change. She divides the story into four broad periods. The first, from 1790 to 1810, began with the revolutionary attempts to enact the good intentions of *ancien régime* philanthropy, intentions epitomized in the worthy aristocratic figure of La Roche-foucauld Liancourt. The period ended with the Napoleonic decree of 1810 establishing *centrales*, the prison fortresses which were to dominate nineteenth-century punishment. The second period, coinciding with the July Monarchy, saw the heyday of bourgeois prison reform, led by Lucas and Villermé, in the first generation of the self-consciously "scientific" investigations of social abuses. This was the moment of Tocqueville and Beaumont's visit to the prisons of America, perhaps the only time before or since when prison discipline was a matter of fashionable conversation throughout Europe, with dinner-tables dividing over the merits of the Auburn and Philadelphia systems of separate or solitary confinement.

This period was brought to a close by the 18th Brumaire. Napoleon III's repression of the revolutionary hopes of 1848 was accompanied, behind the walls, by a tightening up of discipline and routine, and by the creation of reformatories and agricultural colonies for juveniles. The final period, inaugurated with the birth of the Third Republic, witnessed a bifurcation in penal policy: on the one hand, the increasing decarceration of minor offenders by means of fines and suspended sentences, on the other, an increasingly repressive treatment of recidivists. The penal colonies of Guyana entered their grim heyday. They were known as the dry guillotine: of the 42,000 prisoners shipped out there after 1871 16,440 had died from sickness by 1885. At home forensic science emerged to assist in the identification and diagnosis of the "hardened criminal". Fingerprints and Bertillon measurements — the forerunner of all modern criminal record-keeping systems — appear in this

period. Criminology, late nineteenth-century positivism's discourse on the hardened criminal, makes its first grotesque and dogmatic pronouncements in the works of Tarde and Lombroso.

This periodization is helpful, both because it shows how closely French developments paralleled British and German in timing, but also because it enables us to see how closely the history inside the walls is tied to the history of political regimes outside. In

Foucault's account, the new prisons somehow slip into place beneath the surface play of political debate and revolutionary excitement. In O'Brien's account the two histories are twined.

After Foucault, then, O'Brien. After

## To bring back the King

George D. Painter

PIERRE RIBERETTE (Editor)

**Chateaubriand: Correspondance générale, Tome 3, 1815-1820**  
553pp. Paris: Gallimard.  
2 07 024315 X

On June 18, 1815, three miles out in his morning walk from the French court in exile at Ghent, Chateaubriand leaned against a wayside poplar listening to a long southward rumble of thunder. Ought he to turn back, or go on and risk a drenching? The thunder persisted, and now became unmistakably the noise of a gigantic battle far away. The sublime catastrophe of Waterloo had begun; it was his paradoxical and anguished duty to hope, for the second time in fifteen months, that the enemies of France would liberate France by defeating Frenchmen, and so bring back his King.

And then again, on July 5, 1817, dismissed and ruined by that King, he heard the song of a thrush in a sylvan-law's park at Monthoisier (as it happened, only a few miles downstream on the little river Loir from Illiers, the Combray of Proust), and regained, suddenly released from the prison of history into the timeless world of unconscious memory, his lost youth in the woods of Combourg castle, which he proceeded to write next day in his Memoirs. This, as Proust's Narrator remarks at the climax of his novel, is "a sensation of the same species as that of the *maelström*". But Proust's further comment, that such incidents "inspired Chateaubriand to write pages of infinitely greater value in his

*Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe*" than those evoked by the great events of history, may seem more debatable. If art depends on the vision of the artist rather than on the nature of his subject, then the guns of Waterloo need not be inferior to the thrush of Monthoisier, when it is Chateaubriand who is listening. His declared purpose in the *Mémoires* was "to represent the epic of my time" as well as "to explain my inexplicable heart"; and this greatest of autobiographies is concerned as much with history, seen and lived during eighty years by a major observer and participant, as with the story of an individual mind.

These two moments of vision from the *Mémoires* are emblematic though brief in the every-day continuum of the new third volume of the *Correspondance générale*, which covers the first five years of Chateaubriand's career as a statesman. When the King returned, three weeks after Waterloo, France was revolutionary and Napoleonic genocide wanted to be a constitutional parliamentary monarchy on the English model, with two Chambers, and even a Charter. In both houses a "pure" or "ultra" royalist majority, with Chateaubriand prominent among its leaders and supreme among its speakers, found itself unopposedly deprived of power for being more royalist than the King, under a government of republicans and imperial left-overs and fellow-travellers. It was Chateaubriand more than anyone who devised the tactics and created the climate of opinion which prepared the fall in 1820 of the King's favourite and police chief, the amiable sinister Decazes (there is something of him, I think, in Stendhal's Count Mosca), and the beginnings of "ultra" victory which brought the long high summer of the Restoration.

So the letters now become fascinating not only as the real-life background of a work of art (which turns out to tell the truth), or as biographical material, or as prose with a tang of genius, but as a new primary source for a vital and neglected epoch of French history. Of the 500 letters here presented only half were available in the imperfect old edition of Louis Thomas; more than a quarter are entirely unpublished, and many of the rest virtually unknown, being gathered from forgotten periodicals or dealers' catalogues, or from the invaluable annual *Bulletin de la Société Chateaubriand*, which has just celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. As before, Pierre Riberette has admirably performed his immense task of collecting, discovering, correcting from surviving autographs, dating and annotating texts which were hitherto so sadly dispersed, misread, mislaid and misinterpreted.

We leave Chateaubriand on New Year's Eve 1820, retiring discreetly upstairs as ambassador to Berlin, after victoriously bringing his party-leaders Villèle and Corbière into the government. The next decade would see him ambassador to London, envoy to the Congress of Verona, a brilliantly successful foreign minister, dismissed again for high-principled intransigence, ambassador to Rome in convalescent time, and end with two more honourable and financially disastrous resignations, and the expulsion of a King who would never return again.

## The rising Republican

Patrick McCarthy

DENIS MACSHANE

**François Mitterrand: A Political Odyssey**  
278pp. Quartet, £8.95.  
0 7043 2344 3

As Denis MacShane states in the introduction to *François Mitterrand: A Political Odyssey*, he has drawn heavily on work done by other researchers, whether English-speaking like J. R. Frenan and David Lowe, or French like Franz-Olivier Giesbert. But, if this book contains little new material, it offers a simple, sensible account of Mitterrand's political career. MacShane is a left-winger but he is never sectarian and his book will be extremely useful to the general reader who wants to know what to make of the Socialist victory in France in 1981.

As a man Mitterrand is enigmatic. MacShane depicts his various incarnations as *résistant*, archetypal Fourth Republic politician, stubborn enemy of De Gaulle and then Socialist Party leader. But to understand the man behind these many masks one would have to delve into the political culture of the Third Republic in which Mitterrand grew up. In 1974 the entire French political class knew that Georges Pompidou had cancer and that France was being governed by a man whose judgment might be clouded by drugs. As opposition leader, Mitterrand had every right to make this a political issue and yet he did not because his sense of privacy told him that Pompidou should be left to die with dignity. One cannot imagine an American politician taking this view but Mitterrand had grown up in a society where matters like illness, sexual morality and drunkenness belonged in the private domain. What went on behind the shuttered windows of a French provincial town did not form part of the political debate.

Mitterrand belongs to the world of Jaurès, the village schoolmaster, Péguy and the Dreyfus Case. His ignorance of economics, his concern for individual freedom and his language, which is flavoured with rhetoric and abounds in literary allusions, are all hallmarks of pre-1939 France. His long battle with De Gaulle was based on two complementary principles of Third Republic politics. The first was that, although France could be governed by shifting, centrist coalitions, these merely bridged the

gulf that yawned between the right and the left. The second was that this gulf existed because the battles of the French Revolution between monarchists and republicans, the white and the red, were still going on. Since De Gaulle had cast himself in the role of a monarch it remained only for Mitterrand to castigate him for destroying republican liberties. The presidential election of 1965 was a rematch between the revolutionaries of 1848 and Louis Napoleon.

When Mitterrand relaunched the Socialist Party in the 1970s he gave it legitimacy by anchoring it firmly on the left. He spurned alliances with the centre in favour of the Common Programme signed between the Socialists and the Communists and, although the Communists deserted him in 1977, he has given them four, admittedly minor, posts in his government.

MacShane points out correctly that in the presidential election of 1981 Mitterrand profited from the mistakes made by the other parties. One might go further and suggest that his

supposed rivals conspired to bring about his victory. By sabotaging the union of the left and by supporting the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, Georges Marchais succeeded in reducing his party's share of the vote by 25 per cent. The Gaullist leader, Jacques Chirac, ran against Giscard d'Estaing in the first round and gave him only token support in the second. Meanwhile Giscard committed the gravest sin a professional politician can commit: by his personal arrogance and his bizarre friendship with Bokassa he managed to lose an election which he had seemed certain to win three months earlier.

Luck played a great part in Mitterrand's victory, while the dynamics of the French electoral system brought him a second triumph in the parliamentary elections. For two decades right-wing politicians had been telling the people that they must give their president a parliamentary majority. Now the French responded by voting massively for Mitterrand's Socialists. So it would be wrong to imagine that these victories represent a major change in French society or a

vast popular yearning for socialism. But Mitterrand has been given an opportunity and his success or failure in exploiting it will determine not only his place in French history — like De Gaulle he is morbidly conscious of history — but the next ten years of French life. MacShane reminds us that the chief economic issue of the election was unemployment, which was heading for the two million mark. Giscard and his prime minister Barre had prodded industry to cut costs and introduce new technology; unemployment was the price that had to be paid for modernization. But in the 1981 elections the French declared that the price was too high. Since many of them had been sacked they decided to sack Giscard.

Throughout Europe unemployment has become the most pressing problem and it is not to be explained away as part of a temporary recession. It is both an expression of the stagnation into which the Western economies have fallen since 1973 and the result of a sharp decline in the older, labour-intensive industries like steel or textiles. Even if the Western countries

succeed in reviving their economies, unemployment — and especially youth unemployment — will remain because the exotic new industries like biotechnology or micro-circuits are capital-intensive.

The French Socialists have affirmed that they will combat both stagnation and unemployment. Their strategy is partly traditional Keynesianism — expansion of demand and creation of jobs in the public sector — and partly socialist. By nationalizing the private banks and some of France's biggest companies they hope to steer investment towards sectors that will be profitable and rich in jobs. It is too soon to pass judgment on their experiment, although the devaluations and the resort to a wage and price freeze are not encouraging and might remind British observers of the 1964-70 Wilson government. But Mitterrand's policies are the first significant break with the orthodoxies of recent years in France, which is why his presidency is so intriguing and why Denis MacShane has done well to write this book.

## A Balkan Boswell

Stephen Clissold

VLADIMIR DEDIJER

**Novi priloz za biografiju Josipa Broza Tita**  
1258pp. Zagreb: Mladost/Rijeka: Liburniya

Vladimir Dedijer's massive collection of "New Contributions for a Biography of Josip Broz Tito" would seem at first sight designed to amplify his *Prilozci*, published in 1953, the fullest account hitherto available in Serbo-Croat of the life of the Yugoslav leader of whom the author has been widely accounted the semi-official biographer. A former reporter for the Belgrade newspaper *Politika*, Dedijer fought with the Partisans and chronicled their struggle in a day-by-day diary which remains an indispensable, if necessarily subjective, source for any history of that complex conflict. Though never himself a prominent political or military figure, he was sufficiently close to the inner leadership to write with insight and apparent authority. He was closest of all to the movement's agitprop chief Milovan Djilas, and when the latter

broke with Tito in 1954, he followed him for a time into the political wilderness before eventually regaining to some extent Tito's good graces.

The *Novi priloz* might thus have been expected to flesh out the earlier portrait of the formidable soldier-statesman whose cult the post-Tito régime has been at pains not to let preserve but to intensify. Though much of the present compilation seems more relevant to the life and opinions of its author than to its avowed subject, such new light as it does throw on the latter is indeed still largely flattering. The same cannot, however, be said of the men who once formed Tito's closest entourage. The Yugoslav Revolution, like others, has already devoured many of its prominent children. Hebrang, once Tito's friend and Communist boss of Croatia, met his end in a Belgrade prison at the time of the post-war clash with Stalin. As Jovanovic, ex-Chief of Staff, was shot trying to leave the country during the same dispute, Djilas, too radical in his push for democratic reforms, was disgraced and imprisoned. Rankovic, the sinister Communist police-chief, was ousted on suspicion of plotting to challenge his master. Now Dedijer

has hurled a new fistful of bricks at his old comrades. Some are aimed at those who (like Kardelj), Tito's closest lieutenant) are dead, or (like Djilas) have been muzzled, and so cannot fight back; but those still in power are not only fighting back but making every effort to limit the influence of a book which is proving as controversial (and eagerly sought after) as any published in Yugoslavia since the war.

The reader dipping into this banquet may come up with many piquant trifles: details, for instance, about Tito's first (Russian) wife or his wartime mistress, or tantalizing references to the confidential papers said to have been found after his death hidden away in his widow's washing-machine. But it is as a serious historian that this prolific and polemical reporter aspires to be, and should be judged. His present book certainly contains interesting new material, such as the exchanges with the Communist Party during the latter's last doubts about Tito's leadership of the Communist Party in Croatia in 1941. But in general this unwieldy work is a disappointment to the historian. The absence of any index makes it difficult to use. Nor are the "Contributions"

offered by any means always relevant or new. For example, Rankovic's account of his rescue from a Belgrade hospital has appeared at least twice before, first in Dedijer's *Diary* and then in his original *Prilozci*. Documents are quoted without proper indication of source. After stating, for instance, in the text of the book that when Churchill and Tito met at Naples on August 12, 1944, no official record was made of their talks, Dedijer publishes two detailed accounts of the latter in his documentary appendix without further explanation; both, incidentally, are of British origin and now in the PRO.

His treatment of British-Yugoslav relations is in general marred by prejudice and a strange indifference to evidence unfavourable to his theses. Thus he surmises that when Captain Hudson, the first British liaison officer, reached Belgrade in 1941, he brought with him secret instructions urging the Chetnik leader to attack the Communist-led Partisans, whereas we know from Hudson's own account (published in *British Policy towards Wartime Resistance in Yugoslavia and Greece*, edited by Phyllis Auty and Richard Clogg, 1975, p.91) that his brief was precisely the opposite — "to coordinate the forces of resistance against the enemy". No less far-fetched is Dedijer's contention that when the Partisans, before breaking through the ring of Axis and Chetnik forces in the famous battle of the Neretva, sent secret emissaries to discuss an exchange of prisoners and a truce with the Germans which would give them a free hand to liquidate their Chetnik rivals, they were justified in doing so because "the most aggressive sections in Great Britain, specially the group round SOE, were preparing to intervene by arms in Yugoslavia with the help of the forces of occupation and the Chetniks." And this at the very moment (March 1943) when SOE had recruited and was training Yugoslav members of the Canadian Communist Party to be dropped in to the Partisans to prepare the reception of a regular British Military Mission.

Further volumes of *Novi priloz* are promised; that relating to the rift between Tito and Stalin should be of special interest, for even at his most controversial Dedijer is a forceful and stimulating writer. But will they be allowed to appear? To this Balkan Boswell, Tito is still undoubtedly a great man, but one whose feet, if not actually made of clay, at least have more mud on them than his heirs like to admit.

The established series, "The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant", has recently been supplemented by *Ulysses S. Grant: Essays and Documents*, the first volume of a projected new series of occasional Grant studies, under the editorship of David L. Wilson and John Y. Simon (158pp. Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, \$13.95, 0 8093 1019 8).

## Imperial intimacies

John Eldred Howard

CHRISTAL DE TOURMIER-BONAZZI (Editor)

**Napoleon: Lettres d'amour à Joséphine**  
464pp. Paris: Fayard.

The main compilations of Napoleon's letters to Joséphine began in 1833 when Queen Hortense published an edition of 228 letters which she had acquired on her mother's death. Another score had already been printed and a similar number were to appear later. In 1929 Léon Cerf produced a so-called comprehensive edition of 239 letters; Bourgaet, in 1941, offered 254; Savant, in 1955, 265; Huet, in 1968, 266. The indications of perspective and critical apparatus provided by these later editors were at best imperfect, though some datings and textual readings were corrected; but in any case the Hortense autographs were not available to them.

In 1979 the complete Hortense portfolio was deposited by Prince Napoleon in the Archives Nationales. A Keeper of the Archives has now edited this and all other known letters with scrupulous attention to the manuscripts or facsimiles whenever these are known. The result is a volume of 269 letters of which 241 can be accepted as complete and almost word-perfect.

The remaining eighteen have

perforce been copied from printed sources; the originals of two of them have surfaced briefly in salerooms, the rest are entirely unknown. Twelve first appeared in 1827 in the *Mémoires d'une contemporaine*, a total fabrication by various hands and attributed to "de Saint-Etienne", a demimonde of the Restoration; yet the letters themselves can be traced back through the publisher Ladvocat and Madame de Genlis to a cupboard at Malmaison. In one case we must rely on the often unreliable Bourgaet, in another — a fragment only — on Las Cases' memory after fifteen years; Masson claimed to have copied one from the autograph and one was published by Hortense but the original has disappeared. While they may not be wholly accurate, nothing in the texts of these letters raises any doubt as to their authenticity. The editor does, however, give a note of caution about the genuineness of two others, first published respectively by Bourgaet and Hautmont, with no indication of provenance. To my own mind No 32 is an obvious and incompetent forgery and No 148, though it could have been written by Napoleon, is so out of tone with other letters of about the same date as to be somewhat suspect.

The presentation is good though not impeccable. Tracing the history of a letter can involve turning from footnotes to the final list of sources and back to the initial *note technique*; but it is all there except for the last letter of all, written after the abdication, where

the autograph has been consulted but we are not told where it is. Modern orthography is used throughout, Napoleon's idiosyncratic and sometimes comic spellings being given in footnotes. So too are variant readings by earlier editors, though not for some reason Cerf yet in No 9 Cerf's rendering "ils avec attention" at least makes sense unlike the present "ils a mon attention".

The main interest centres on the correction of the many extemporis and distortions made by Hortense from social, prudish or stylistic motives or from simple misreading of the writer's atrocious hand. Two short letters now published were completely suppressed by her. No 157 shows the Emperor supporting Joséphine against his sister's attempts to upstage her, and No 180 informs us for the first time that the Empress had, painful periods; whereas, as the editor suggests, this throws light on the causes of her sterility is a matter for medical opinion.

It is sad that not all the partial excisions are pointed out in footnotes, though most are. When Napoleon is sorry that his wife has had trouble with her teeth, how, without being told, would suspect that the words "tu as bien fait de les faire arranger" had been deleted, to call in the dentist for a technique seems harmless enough, but any such reference to these notoriously discoloured teeth was unacceptable. Today Hortense seems disconcertingly protective of her mother's reputation and occasionally her own, yet in the situation at the time it is quite

understandable. No great revelations emerge and the famous bowdlerizations of the more remarkable passages are fewer and less remarkable than some may expect. But at least the Baron de Képen makes his bow into the pages of history.

The letters throw little light on the great events of the time but a lot on the great man of the time. They are the intimate record of a marriage beset by infidelities and deceit, jealousy and petty annoyances and finally sundered by the axe of the *raison d'état*; yet there was genuine love, early passion being followed by a deep affection which outlasted divorce and remarriage. Only five letters from Joséphine to Napoleon are, I believe, known and these could and should have been included. Read by itself No 252, the first after the marriage to Marie-Louise, is not greatly revealing, in conjunction with Joséphine's letter which prompted it and with her reply, the full poignancy of the situation becomes clear (these two letters are given by Hortense, Cerf and Savant).

Despite some peripheral imperfections, this book is of real importance in that at long last it gives us complete and probably perfect texts of all the known letters. Maybe there are only one or two that will ever be seen. Yet Napoleon certainly wrote many more and in related fields there have been some rich discoveries during recent decades. Descendants of Nelson's officers should search their attics for what might prove the most revealing of all — missives from Egypt.

## Hailing the chief

David Adams

JOSEPH ALSOP

**F. D. R: The Life and Times of Franklin D. Roosevelt**  
256pp (with 260 black-and-white illustrations). Thames and Hudson.  
£10.50.  
0 500 01267 9

The story is not told here, but in October 1936 a Kiowa Indian sent the following message to James A. Farley: "After election Big Chief, he hit 'um tom-tom, put on rooster feathers and celebrate for WIDDER CHIEF ROOSEVELT." In his volume on the life and times of Franklin Roosevelt, Joseph Alsop celebrates the grandeur of FDR's achievements in what he calls a period of creativity that has had no parallel in any other free society in the twentieth century.

Alsop, a political columnist, is distantly related to the Roosevelts, for his maternal grandmother was Theodore Roosevelt's younger sister. He felt therefore, a "bizarre web of interrelationships", and a degree of flattery accompanied this remote connection with power. The kinship groups were well aware of their own prominence, and were proud to belong to the late nineteenth-century establishment of White Anglo-Saxon Protestant Americans. Alsop uses the words of Edith Wharton as a point of

reference for their folk-ways at a time when these were already being challenged by new forces, forces that came to be harnessed by the Democratic Party under the leadership of Al Smith and FDR. As a journalist he was not an uncritical court commentator, but neither was he a WASP who resisted change and regarded Roosevelt as a traitor to his class.

His book was prepared to mark the centenary of Roosevelt's birth, and it rises out of the ruck of Rooseveltiana as an appealing and highly personal study that deserves the widest possible readership. Alsop's introduction is followed by essay-chapters that are interspersed with photographic sections entitled "THE LIFE OF FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT." In his volume on the life and times of Franklin Roosevelt, Joseph Alsop celebrates the grandeur of FDR's achievements in what he calls a period of creativity that has had no parallel in any other free society in the twentieth century.

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Springwood for the use of his political aides.

Personality looms large in Alsop's technique as, from the inside's position, he seeks to set the record straight. When FDR was assistant secretary of the Navy during the first World War what happened to him personally was more important than what happened to him politically, and the focus is the crisis over Lucy Mercer, Alsop's insistence that the love affair was contained in the way that he suggests may also indicate his own subscription to a code of behaviour that, although certainly tribal, was perhaps more virtuous in theory than in practice. Lineage may not preclude passion. Alsop provides a viable alternative to the innuendo that he is not himself totally immune from the temptation to suggest degrees of involvement that are at best unproven. Certainly Mrs Lucy Mercer Rutherford was at Warm Springs when Roosevelt died, but to write that he was "in the arms of another woman only a few minutes before he drew his last breath" is cruel to Eleanor, for whom the author otherwise writes with sympathy and understanding.

In general, however, he beats the tom-tom, wears his rooster feather proudly, and gives us what is to date the best celebration of a president whose humane concerns were encompassed in an intensely human temperament.



## commentary

## Ibsen into vaudeville

Zinoviy Zinik

Artists and Admirers  
Riverside Studios

Under the direction of David Leveaux at the Riverside Studios, Alexander Ostrovsky's poverty-stricken artists in a Russian provincial town of the 1880s surrender to their rich admirers; the power of wealth defeats pure idealism, though a student, representing the younger generation of the Russian intelligentsia, intends to go on fighting corruption to the end, and against all hope. For the student's first pupil, his would-be fiancée, a provincial actress called Negina (Michelle Wade), who is impoverished, is in a constant state of hysteria, respected neither by her managers nor even, it seems, by her handiwork, and whose grating voice is full of irritation, vanity and ambition (we do not see her perform, so we cannot tell whether she is right to regard herself as a great talent), accepts a rather unexpected amorous proposal from a mysterious millionaire, industrialist and landowner called Velicov – played by David Belcher, who behaves like a role of long experience and looks like Count Dracula in a flame-red padded cape. Negina leaves with Velicov for his country estate and abandons her tutor, the enthusiastic day-dreaming post-graduate student Melusov (Nick Dunning, who is strangely dressed for a student in a kind of Carpathian wood-cutter's jacket and Parisian taxi-driver's cap), who is a propagator of enlightenment among the lower classes and a sworn enemy of every form of corruption. This unexpected turn of events takes the rest of the cast in this production by surprise, leaving them envious of Negina's cunning which enables her to leave the stage earlier than they themselves are allowed to by Ostrovsky. Her departure, however, clears the stage for Melusov to make a speech about the invincible nature of idealism.

I am not at all against "distorting" the original on stage. Nothing resuscitates classics better than interpretations which turn masterpieces inside out and upside down. It is especially welcome with foreign drama: one inevitably has to make it more accessible and comprehensible by playing on motifs and details familiar to a contemporary local audience. So I find more to welcome than to criticize in the act by Ken Hall, which is elegant and functional with its moving screens on the backstage, even though in Act I it resembles an American "log cabin" (rough, simple, but nice) when in fact it should represent a squalid rented accommodation in a provincial town (three small, stuffy, suffocating and damp rooms). In Act IV it should represent a buffet for first-class

passengers on a railway station, but here it is more reminiscent of a Chatham Junction platform during the strike. It is definitely not what Ostrovsky had in mind, but still it provides the perfect setting for the only immaculate scene of this confused production. This is the scene with the departure of Negina and Velicov in which the actors and their admirers are sitting uncomfortably on a long bench, emotionally captivated (each in his own way) by the sentimental and highfalutin gibberish about Negina's gifted and beautiful soul uttered by the half-drunk old assistant manager Narokov (played by Clyde Pollitt like Newman Noggis is the RSC *Nicholas Nickleby*, which is quite acceptable). It is one of the rare moments of insight in the production into Ostrovsky's play: everyone is astounded by this speech and finally feels a prisoner in a world from which the sole escape is to the stage, the only place where lies and without going to the trouble of transforming the grand old man of the Moscow vernacular into a second-hand admirer of melodrama.

ultimate freedom which she will not trade for anything. Without that understanding of Melusov's role (which is impossible for an actor who has been given the part of a naive young idealist, as in this translation) Negina can only be played as a hysterical woman, forced to trade her first love for money as though she has suddenly been transported from Ibsen drama into vaudeville with exotic names and fancy costumes. Ostrovsky's comedy, however, becomes funnier in English translation, since Russian proverbs sound, when translated literally, like jokes. (For example, "No place for an apple to fall" instead of the Russian proverb's English equivalent "No room to swing a cat".) But in my opinion artists as gifted as Hanif Kureishi and David Leveaux and the whole cast, for that matter, could have produced much better vaudeville by writing something original in English without going to the trouble of transforming the grand old man of the Moscow vernacular into a second-hand admirer of melodrama.

## Lear in the Fool's shadow

Stanley Wells

King Lear

Royal Shakespeare Theatre

Lear

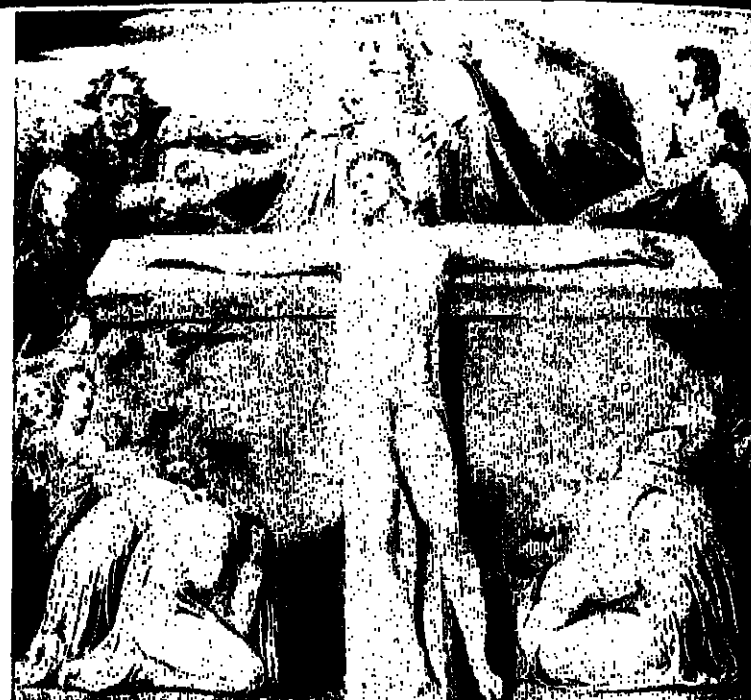
The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon

In a fascinating pairing, the Royal Shakespeare Company offers, at its large Stratford theatre, Shakespeare's *King Lear*, and in its studio theatre – The Other Place – Edward Bond's *Lear*. Both plays are directed with great talent and dedicated seriousness. It is perhaps inescapable that the classic masterpiece recovers the more original, and therefore the more arguable, interpretation, and that the modern play seems a far more faithful realization in stage terms of the script as written. We know Shakespeare's intentions less clearly than we know Bond's; and the passage of time has created interpretative problems – which challenge directors to find means of adding to the audience's understanding and guiding their reactions – which are akin to those of the academic critic, who has to ask some of the same questions as the directors but is under less pressure to provide positive, or even provisional, answers.

Adrian Noble, making his welcome debut as director of a Shakespeare play for this company, and of any play on its big stage, has concentrated much of his attention on the Fool. Long after the King has vanished from the action, the Fool, in his last speech, says over Cordelia's dead body. "And my poor fool's hanged." Is he speaking of his Fool or of Cordelia? If readers have given us the answer from the start, at the centre of the stage is a figure flanked on each side by three chairs. The house darkens. When the lights go up again, the throne is occupied by the bodies of a clown and a girl, their heads thrown back, their torsos falling away from each other but linked by a cord around their necks. A spotlight keeps our shocked attention upon them as the court assembles and the first words are spoken.

It makes a brilliantly theatrical opening, but also a distracting one. It emphasizes the Fool from the start, whereas Shakespeare gives him an entry which is both carefully prepared and deliberately delayed. By opening the play with a bang, it reduces the impact of the King's entry, engineered by Shakespeare as a contrast to the low-level initial dialogue, to which it becomes difficult to attend. And it results in rapid anti-climax when, after highlighting the Fool for a while, the bodies disappear. The Fool's role, as a kind of Lear's shadow, is more than usually apparent in this production. The Fool's role, as a kind of Lear's shadow, is more than usually apparent in this production. The Fool's role, as a kind of Lear's shadow, is more than usually apparent in this production.

The Fool's role, as a kind of Lear's shadow, is more than usually apparent in this production. The Fool's role, as a kind of Lear's shadow, is more than usually apparent in this production. The Fool's role, as a kind of Lear's shadow, is more than usually apparent in this production.



"Christ nailed to the Cross", a drawing by William Blake, of 1800-1803, sold at Sotheby's on June 8.

play's interpretative problems which at other points, too, affects this production. Modern audiences do, presumably, need help in understanding the function of a Jacobean court fool; Adrian Noble follows Trevor Nunn in relating this one to the traditions of the music-hall, adding more than a hint of the circus. Lear's Fool is in white-face, has a red false nose, walks knock-kneed in baggy trousers, and carries a half-sized violin case, handy when a phallic symbol is required; he scratches and strums on the instrument from time to time, accompanying his snatches of rhyme and song. Lear treats him at one point as a ventriloquist's dummy; many of his jests are apparently long-familiar to both of them: Lear joins in with gestures of the vaudeville routine. We are left in no doubt as to the Fool's rapport with, and concern for, the King, or his function as an entertainer. The device works wonderfully well in the duologue – one of Shakespeare's most modern-seeming pieces of writing – in which Lear, speaking of Cordelia's acknowledgements, "I did her wrong". Suddenly, chillingly, raw nerves are touched and exposed. Master and servant are close to the footlights; their shadows loom menacingly behind them.

There are other striking visual images. Offering Lear two crowns of an egg, the Fool breaks the egg, swallows the contents and parades round with both halves of the shell in his eye sockets. The strange lines of Merlin's prophecy, sometimes cut, are blown up into a big set-piece, with tumbling, song, and dance. Antony Sher executes the entire conception with brilliant vocal and physical virtuosity, but does not altogether prevent it from seeming over-interpretative, not least at its close. This Fool goes out of the play, as he had come into it, with a bang: stabbed in a duologue by the mad Lear, continuingly destructive of his own good.

So strong a Fool is in danger of transforming Lear into Lear's shadow. Bob Michael Gambon is a substantial King, authoritative, strong-voiced, though more convincing in action than in repose, when he lacks inwardness; there is no particular sense of shock on Cordelia's "Nothing", or of mounting disbelief during Goneril's harangue, but his curling of her lip is powerful. He has the voice for the storm scenes, but the director sacrifices credibility to visual effect on "Blow winds", for which Lear is perched with the Fool on a kind of tall bird-trip above a sea of swirling fog, into which it gradually descends. Madness is only lightly sketched in: Lear's scene with the blind Gloucester is more than usually apparent in this production. The Fool's role, as a kind of Lear's shadow, is more than usually apparent in this production.

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## commentary

## The Cave of Poverty and Poetry

John Fuller

The Beggar's Opera  
Cottesloe Theatre

In Richard Eyre's vigorous new production of *The Beggar's Opera* for the National Theatre at the Cottesloe, it is to be supposed that the Beggar himself is long dead and that his opera is still being performed over a hundred years later, by derelicts, pickpockets, bowler-hatted con-men, pimps and whores. Gay's Player who interrupts the action because he can't bear to see Macheath hanged is replaced by a white-tied toff for whom, apparently, the play is being put on. But where is all this taking place? Britten's version was conceived as occurring in a great laundry, where the beggars who acted it had crept in order to keep warm. Eyre's is a more purely theatrical space, compounded of Charenton, Mayhew, Brecht's Soho and the all-purpose timber of Bart's Oliver! John Quinter's Dickensian set is a marvellous clutter of ledgers, astrolabes and overflowing wardrobes. When David Ryal's morose Lockit puts on his boots, the putting on of the boots becomes an absorbing activity. When a bosom is bared or soup splashed about, these things become more than theatrical symbols: they are tangible necessities. The production absorbs, eclectically, every suggestion from Crichton to Toulouse-Lautrec appropriate to the moment. The dust, the sour erotic grime, the sweat, the saucers of tea, the juggling, the bad teeth: excellent characterization is accompanied by an inventive and patient realism (and beautifully timed stage business) which roots Gay's moral insights in an actual world of shabby ambition and pathetic asiduousness.

But it is, of course, a mistake to conceive the play as being performed by the poor, since Gay's framework requires the specific absurdity of such hopelessly incongruous and botched material being presented in a theatre. The notion is one that he had already rehearsed in *The What D'Ye Call It*.

When the steward of a country house comes to put on a play which he has presumably written himself he will want it to sound as sublime as Otway or Dryden, even though the only serious events that he knows anything about are all of purely local significance: poaching, conscription and unwanted pregnancies. Similarly, when a beggar comes to write an opera he knows nothing of Alexander the Great but everything about the criminals who control his world. Why can't beggars write operas? Gay's very first words ("If Poverty be a Title to Poetry, I am sure No-body can dispute mine") suggest that since most poets are incompetent they will make no money out of their work. The Beggar is really therefore (as indeed he is openly in the introduction to *Polly*) an incompetent in handling genres. The point was made by Pope in *The Dunciad*. The Cave of Poverty and Poetry is a place where, among other hopes of decorum, "Tragedy and Comedy embrace" and where, therefore, the Beggar's notion of presenting an opera about criminals would appear quite acceptable. In the correct world it is not, and that is why he is a beggar.

In Eyre's version, then, Macheath is played by a Glaswegian pimp in spats, Peckham by an Irish cockney sneak thief, Polly by a prostitute, and so on. The opportunity for mock-heroic self-promotion, for charm, for amoral sprezzatura and the rest of it, is thus simply not there. There is no cultural disability, no moral shock. The criminals are not being portrayed by the criminals: they are being played by the actors. In a flash-and-gilt theatre, Gay's aphorisms are satirical quibbles about fashionable vices and political corruption. In a dusty loft filled with a collection of the Victorian era, they are the social parables of a world. Perhaps any good modern director will search for a Harmer

message than the play can bear, but here on occasion the strain shows. As, for example, in the manner of delivery of the final chorus: its upshot ("But think of this Maxim, and put off your Sorrow/The Wretch of To-Day, may be happy To-morrow") is in essence a continuation of the jest about the inconsequently happy endings of Italian opera, but is here presented by the assembled company directly facing the audience in a suddenly stark and admonitory stance, singing in strident staccato, as though it were the Chorus of the Poorest of the Poor from *Die Dreigroschenoper*.

The qualities which opera takes seriously (love, ambition, loyalty) and which Gay intended to reinforce by making us reassess them in an absurd context, are in this production likely to seem really illusory after all in the context of an oppressive Victorian London which the delighted walker of Trivia could hardly have envisaged. Take Polly, for example. Polly's love is one of the few reliable ideals in a world of particularly unreliable concrete things (like missing property or double-dealing employers) so that our feelings are taxed when her lofty emotion is bestowed upon a robber and multiple bigamist whom most other characters in the play wish at one time or another to betray. Gay makes sure, then, that we are attracted to Macheath as well, and does so by lending him an aristocratic swagger that contrasts favourably with the dogged book-keeping of Peckham. In Eyre's version, Polly is not only

"played" by a prostitute, but oddly reappears in Act II as one of the whores (so, disconcertingly, does Mrs Peckham – though her part is not doubled with Mrs Trapes as Gay intended). As Polly, Belinda Sinclair is a tall red-head, with a striking bone-structure. She sits on the arm of her father's chair as bold as you please, whereas we should feel shocked to hear her parents call her "slut" and "baggage" simply because she has married for love. Similarly, the Macheath of Paul Jones exhibits not those high-born heroic pretensions that would lend a shocking yet engaging edge to his reckless sexuality, but something more like the slightly dazed aggressiveness of a Rangers supporter determined against the odds to have a good night out.

Thus the encounter between Polly and Macheath in Act I which should totally charm us ("Were I laid on Greenland's Coast" &c) is an occasion not for mock-pathos but for groping against a table. Moreover, the play is presented not in Gay's three acts but in two parts: the absence of an interval after Polly and Macheath's first parting somehow prevents their relationship from being deeply enough established in the audience's consciousness. A further result of the arrangement is that does benefit from the weight and *allegando* due to the impending interval – that between Macheath and Lucy Lockit, as she helps him to escape from Newgate. Indeed, Stuart's Lucy is a very finely-judged portrayal

of heartbroken rage. Unlike Peckham (a shrewd and natural performance from Harry Towb), Lockit has no very consistent or authoritative view of life for his daughter to defy. She is therefore her own woman, a tiny pregnant bundle of enormous and conflicting feelings: much of Gay's strange recipe of comedy and sentiment is conveyed not as is usual in the Peckham scenes, but in the Lockit scenes.

The play's fame is largely as an embryo musical, and in the past has suffered from musical mistreatment (not least in the recording where the Old Vic's careless and fruitfully delivered is punctuated by professional singers in sedate Handel-like ensembles). This musical arrangement by Dominic Muldowney is discreet, low-key, a subtle aura of concertina and psaltery (though perhaps at its best when avoiding specific connotations such as Mrs Trapes's *Fiddler on the Roof*ish "In the Days of my Youth" or the accompaniment to Jenny Diver's "Before the Barn-door crowsing", with its two quavers on the first beat of the bar pretending to be Die Scherzuber Jenny, an allusion which the words won't stand). The singing, and the relationship between singing and speaking (so hard to manage), are first-rate. All in all, Gay would be intrigued and amazed at the rich texture of this production. In many ways his work has been flattered by the director's imagination, and none of the misconceptions have outlined prevents it from providing an exciting evening in the theatre.

## Conquistador of the Useless

Alan Hollinghurst

Fitzcarraldo  
Camden Plaza

Werner Herzog's new film *Fitzcarraldo* is both the result of and directly about a hugely ironic disproportion between life and art. Its very filming, in the jungles of Brazil and Peru, involved more danger and more mortalities than those enacted in the spectacular story it unfolds. Herzog repudiated the Hollywood studio simulacra of titanic and catastrophic effects: in the great central sequence of the film a real ship is dragged, by a vast system of winches, over the hill which separates two rivers, and then, cut free, it genuinely shoots some fiendish rapids with actors risking their lives on board. This insistence on the reality of the enactment furiously splits our attention: if the film is not made with toys its subject is not a way of heroism but of its own making, and it implicitly subjects to analysis and comment the obsessions of this most obsessive filmmaker himself.

Within the story of the film life and art are thrillingly and ludicrously offset against each other. Fitzcarraldo, the Irish prospector (played by Klaus Kinski), is obsessed with Italian opera; at the beginning of the film he arrives with his mistress Molly (Claudia Cardinale), filthy after a long river journey, to hear Caruso singing *Ernani*.

In the midst of the Manaus opera-house. His passion is to bring opera to his own town of Iquitos, over a thousand miles up-river, and the only reasonable means of raising money for this is by through rubber. Manaus, the product of the rubber boom, is in every way a peroxide town, a palatial fabrication of Italian marbles already decadently rich in the heart of a country of head-hunters and primal unknowns. On the drop-curtain of the opera the Amazon itself is reduced to a mythological décor; outside, the horses are given champagne, and bank-notes are fed to the fish.

Fitzcarraldo, enthusiastically, embraces these paradoxes. In his shack the Indian children gather to hear Caruso singing "Vesti la giubba". His knees almost reeling on the record in their expressionless curiosity. Even the domestic pig, Fitzcarraldo promises,

will have a box at the opera – and it listens to the music happily enough. Kinski gives a performance of far greater variety than he has done before, bizarrely blond, both down-like and visionary, his passionate, disdainful mood breaking at times into dazzling laughter; his Herzogian obsessiveness here admits of a more exalted and fantastic volatility than was possible in the insane megalomania of *Aguirre*. The result is that his Marlovian ambitiousness takes on a more human and entertaining aspect. He is still the puppet of his own overriding will, but his goal is so much more doily that the film cannot help but register Fitzcarraldo's impracticality as a naive idea of reality at the same time as showing his astonishing power to reorganize it into an operatic spectacle. When the rubber project fails, Fitzcarraldo achieves his temporary triumph by bringing his boat back to Iquitos on a whole orchestra and company from Lima on board performing *Puritani*, his little stage-sets of castles and mountains hilariously steaming along in front of the limitless Amazonian jungle. Here the protagonist, the "Conquistador of the Useless", himself takes delight in the incongruity, reinterpreting the doomed futility with which, at the opening of *Aguirre*, the impediments of Spanish civilization were laboriously transported into a hostile and prehistoric world.

This is not to say that *Fitzcarraldo* is not a serious film. Herzog is better than ever with scenery. The title-shots show a high panorama of mist-filled jungle at dawn and wordless choruses intimacy the mystery as we are told that this is the country where God did not finish his creation. Herzog has done all this before, most notably in *Hara Dux Glas*, where clouds streaming over a mountain produced a hippyish kind of wonder; this automatic awe, rhetorically stimulated, is intended as a promise that he plans to take us to the extremes of experience. Far more impressive are the sequences, magically intensified by Strauss's *Tot und Verklärung*, where the ship meanders its way through the ever more vertiginous jungle (the sense of "a" which gains in weight by being left vague in kind, its power lies precisely in its enigma, an intellectual apprehension of an

immense otherness. In *Fitzcarraldo* Herzog's daring has been to confront this speculative profundity with a high-spirited recognition of other ways of seeing. Fitzcarraldo's records of Caruso, played from the roof of the ship, silence the drums of the threatening Jivaro.

The interplay between symbolic vision and riveting mechanical actuality is diversified by the excellent performances of Paul Hittcher as Orinoco Paul, the Dutch captain of the ship, shortsighted, practical and intuitive; Jose Leguayo, as Don Aquilino, a corpulent rubber baron fascinated by his own wealthy folly; and the Amarind Miguel Angel Fuentes as the monolithic Cholo the mechanic. Claudia Cardinale, alas, only grins and giggles. The Indians play the Indians, wonderful in silence, pregnant gesture or multitudinous babble, and set the seal on this absurd fable, paradoxically real in the world which the film has invaded.

The first issue of two beautifully-produced, three-yearly journals have recently appeared from Basil Blackwell, 108 Cowley Road, Oxford OX4 1JF. The *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* is edited by John Boardman, Lincoln Professor of Classical Art and Archaeology, Barry Cunliffe, Professor of European Archaeology, and Sheppard Frere, Professor of the Archaeology of the Roman Empire, all at Oxford. In vol. 1, no. 1, there are articles by Alan V. Johnston on "Geometric squares, Elizabeth Scheldt on the western Cyclades and Crete, Richard Bradley on assemblage variation in the British Neolithic, Barry Cunliffe on "Britain, the Venetian and beyond", and Peter Northover on the metallurgy of the Wilburton Hoards.

*Music Analysis* is edited by Jonathan Dunsby, and is the first English journal to challenge the traditional relegation of analysis as an adjunct to other fields of musical enquiry and to uphold it as a growing discipline in its own right. The first issue contains essays by Hans Keller on "Criticism and Analysis", Arnold Whittall on "Music Analysis as Human Science", Le. Sacer on "Intention in Theory and Practice", Eric W. on "A. A. Dignified Reminiscence in the First Movement of Mozart's G minor Symphony", and Christopher Wintle on Webern's Concerto op. 24, no. 2.

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## Robert Hewison

## Author, Author

***to the editor***

## Michelangelo



**Among this week's contributors**

## Robert Graves

The man whom Mr Burgess presents to readers of his review article, of the name Schuyler Jackson, as "with little learning and no talent," was a conspicuously talented student of literature in his undergraduate years at Princeton University, and prominent there in poetry-centred interest and activity. He later concerned himself intensively with poetry, including the writing of poems,



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# The pattern history weaves

Edna Longley

JOHN MONTAGUE

Selected Poems

189pp. Oxford University Press. £5.95.  
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P. J. KAVANAGH

Selected Poems

87pp. Chatto and Windus. £4.95.  
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John Montague's imaginative persona combines the love poet, the evoker of "memorial life" and the cultural anatomist. This last role, culminating in the grand if imperfect design of *The Rough Field* (1972), has received most attention. Yet the force of that sequence as an exploration of Northern Irish "tribal pain", of "the pattern history weaves" / From one small backward place", turned in the precisely captured Tyrone scenes and portraits of *Poisoned Lands* (1961). There the sensuous self-immersions of Seamus Heaney are anticipated in poems such as "The Trout" ("To this day I can / Taste his terror on my hands") and "The Water Carrier". One stood until the bucket brimmed / Inhaling the musty smell of unspiced berries, / That heavy greenness fostered by water. But Montague's "original townland" is more inhabited than Heaney's, and its violence and mystery more directly express "Ancient Ireland": "The rime and the chant, evil eye and averted head, / Formorian fierceness of family and local feud". "The Old People standing / Like Dolmens round My Childhood", together with their figures from *A Chosen Light* (1967), were later to give *The Rough Field* its communal backbone; while the darker side of Montague's early imagery – petition – putrefaction, superstition – perhaps unconsciously tapped the Ulster unconscious.

More conscious and programmatic, *The Rough Field* sometimes trades immediacy for formulaic leitmotifs: "Shards of a lost (Gaelic) tradition", "Again that note!", "Lines of history / Lines of power". Nevertheless Montague on the whole discovers in his home ground ("Garvagh" means "the rough field") a plausible microcosm for Ulster's complications of race, place and language. On the one hand, "the severed head now chokes / to speak another tongue"; on the other: "Names twining braid Scots and Irish, / Like Fall Brae, springing native / As a whitethorn bush". Douglas Dunn has criticized his historical determinism, the acceptance that "Once again, it happens". But, besides the inevitable fatalism in most contemplations of the Irish question, Montague's natural inclination runs to dignified elegy rather than political argument. Or the "positive art" recommended by Louis MacNeice in the face of fragmentation, *The Rough Field* mourns not only "A New Siege" in Derry, but also the way in which "the New Omega Road", on top of the Plantation, has bulldozed the past. The deportment of the fiddler in "Lament for the O'Neills" corresponds to Montague's own:

With an intricate & mournful mastery the thin bow glides & slides, / Amusing like a birdie poem, / Our tribal pain . . .

The layout of *The Rough Field*, as published by the Dolmen Press, once superbly supported this "bardic" formality. Now, unfortunately, many of Montague's longer poems suffer strange blanks due to excessive space left at the bottom of their first pages. And *The Rough Field*, already weakened by the restoration of certain poems to their former contexts, loses its sections and its separate identity in Part II of the *Selected Poems*.

Even before *The Rough Field* "pattern" and "ritual" were becoming favourite words of Montague's. "The Water Carrier" implies a technical conflict: Recovering the scene, I had hoped to stylize / Like the portrait of an Egyptian water-carrier. Yet halt, estranged by light but memorized life.

Montague's "Irish" poems after *The Rough Field* tend to collapse into a kind of Celtic chic – especially "O'Riada's Farewell": clutter of harpichord / the music leaping / like a long candle flame / to light ancestral faces / pride of music / pride of race

But if the poet, or his intention, sometimes overrules individual poems, John Montague's *Selected Poems* are none the less indispensable. He began to write in the early 1950s when not only Irish politics but Irish poetry could be regarded as a "struggle with casual / Graceless task of swimming / Against a slackening tide". More than any poet of his generation he opened up channels between the Irish and English literary traditions, between regional and cosmopolitan allegiances, between Ulster and Irish perspectives. The fact that tides have turned, bringing in an unexpected shoal of younger Northern poets, must not obscure his achievement.

Although Montague ends *The Rough Field*: "all my circling / to return", he at least began as partly a country poet, an insider, P. J. Kavanagh, so different from his Irish namesake, is the outsider Nature-poet following in the solitary and very

English footsteps of Wordsworth and Edward Thomas. An address to his dead father shows him all too well aware of likely cliché: What would you make of me now, mulling a personal past / In public, and in this quiet corner at last?

An apologia, father, for a flight to a whispering dark, / A hayfoot, strawfoot, clayfoot attempt to grow / Feathers and leaves, a wig of winds . . .

An "Eclogue", which like MacNeice's "Eclogue for Christmas" opposes rural and urban perceptions, waxes even more ironical at the expense of "privileged pastoral". However, the spirit is not always the flesh of Kavanagh's *Selected Poems* justifies the humble contention of his rural spokesman: "Perhaps there should be one man in a field / Standing absurd in a duffel coat watching a tree . . ."

Better at "mulling" than at "watching", unable to integrate the two processes – in any consistent manner, Kavanagh uses too many adjectival, visual, colourful words:

Sky mother-of-pearl. Oyster-colour sun, / A furry lemon. / Silent, full of silences. / Birdless windless trees hold breath . . .

In contrast, Thomas's "rain, / Windless and light" and Larkin's "huge and

birdless silence" do not clutter by their telling adjectives. And, unlike Thomas, Kavanagh hovers indecisively between characterizing a whole environment of weather and season, and illuminating a single detail. The verbosity of *About Time* (1970) fines down to the greater economy of *Life Before Death* (1979); but the best thing in the first poem in that book is an emotion that emerges after some routine itemizing of "thin grass on hills" and "Dark leaves on sycamores": My dreamed adventures narrow down to here:

A lonely house with three souls in it that I care

So much for now I wonder how I can Ever to God or to anyone explain I feel myself a lost and selfish man Who am more fortunate than anyone.

With little new to say about trees, rain, lichen, "soggy wood", "dripping eaves" and "soaking hedges", Kavanagh develops a distinctive vein of domestic and paternal feeling: "A pale face, a hand relinquished at the schoolroom door". His true empathy operates with people, not nature. For example, happier and more romantic than Edward Thomas, he yet splendidly understands:

It would be more less to be welcomed in by an assured Edward Thomas. There must be doubt in heaven, to accommodate him.

Sutton is modest, tentative and rather too content to appear decently baffled. The words "strangeness" and "strange" keep recurring – "How far our world, what strangeness", "we were aware of strangeness", "It is strange to think that . . .". Leaving a sense of mystery, but also a feeling of wistful vagueness at the centre of some very well crafted verse. Too many poems stop quizzically short of revelation – "stirring us each with some uneasiness" – still mirroring some thought / Which stirred within / "Caught in some moment far from common ground". Too much of something comes very close to being nothing.

An anecdotal elegy ends with the lines:

And I'm afraid it's not much Of an elegy for his broken life, but still

What there is, is true. / to which it is hard to resist the rejoinder "but is such plain truth enough?" Can one really bow out of a poem with such an apologetic defensiveness and avoid raising doubts as to whether more might not have been attempted?

As in Elizabeth Jennings's book, the best poems are the most closely observed. The longest piece, "The Bonfire", is excellent, and the delightful "Taxonomical Note" really does celebrate the vivid vocabulary of marbles:

I tell you, there's a poet in the counting of marbles. / He is probably eight years old. His head is full of coloured glass and words. He is a maker. / Unread, untutored, immemorial. / When Sutton is not drawing attention to what he can't quite get at, he offers many perfectly-phrased glimpses of the natural world: "The music of not going anywhere / That quiet water makes against the land".

Philip Larkin's sixtieth birthday year is an appropriate time to remind readers of the special "Philip Larkin Issue" of *Phoenix*, edited by Harry Chambers (Nov 11/12, Autumn/Winter 1973/4), which includes a long essay by Edna Longley on "Larkin, Edward Thomas and the Tradition", outlining the similarities between several themes and aspects of these poets' work; their place in and "central contribution to the development of the [English, indigenous] tradition". The issue (12p 65) is available from Trevis Farm Cottage, Upton Cross, Leakeard, Cornwall. The other essays are by Christopher Ricks, of "The Whitman Weddings"; David Tynes, of "Church Going Revisited: The Building and the Notion of Development in Larkin's Poetry"; Philip Gardner, "The Watery Drum"

## "1945"

A string of the scarlet rubies of Ceylon / Cheated the Customs in a re-sealed tin / Of boiled coagulate sweets . . . to which I turned / My officer's blind eye. The carillon / Was all "St Budeaux" as I brought them in / By rail, the ship-boys, Devonport's draft returned!

Though not in fact: the halt at Keyham slept / In mild mid-morning and its signal-box / Absently clapped down its signal as / We, crawling from Southampton, smoothly crept / Home from Kowloon, from Trinco, from the shocks / And blithely endured alarms of the Moluccas.

My scapegrace sea-pups, what are the memories afloat / In us, grown fat? A too white monument / Tall on the Hoe, ships' plaques, a name like "Howe". / The shot-torn ensign of the "Exeter" – / These are not what we want, nor what was meant; / Instead, the bells – in whose ears, then and now?

No one had said whom I reported to: / I skipped the train before the Dockyard, tore / In a lucky taxi up the marble-streets / And marble-hearted town that Hardy knew, / In a bawdry of bells, the mess-deck's innocent roar / "Get up them stairs!" peeling for her I greeted.

Where's that West Country where each bell peals, / Where no one's given cottonwool for bread, / Flowing with scriptural honey, milk, and wine; / Where the artificer guides the easy wheels / And no cranked labour blacks the overhead? / In women's arms, oh you who crossed the line!

Sheer hulk, Tom Bowling, I observed you climb / Staggeringly the Forder Valley tamed / Into industrial suburb. Novorossiysk / Road, a sardonic legacy of wartime / Naively or duplicitously named, / Seas your arms flail at fame, betrayal, risk.

Somewhere a gross or ghostly woman plucks / At washed-out cottons, pats her hair behind / Absentmindedly, and measures on / Her bony breast something a battered box / Unopened in years has suddenly brought to mind: / A string of the pale small rubies of Ceylon.

Donald Davie

## The Wanderer

Fumes mist of gun-metal, bits pricking / Into a sunk light – I need / one to speak with in this murk, / my fiftieth year its archway, with fog

off the pole's lumbar region. / You fly folk, / I fasten on you a spidery form / quick as blindweed. And I can't

help it. A month back / the redcurrant's orb hung / two seeds, like a kid / supported in its womb. Rain

spots our linked hands – a sharp-witted / heraldry of love. Old stems / bear the redcurrant, new ones the black, / and memory is both. Half my life

I starved the womb, now I want / what she doesn't – gives swaddling clothes / with a folded pram to the neighbour / swollen with redcurrant.

I've spent my memory, I'd rather / the staring wide-eyed world as birds. / The Thai funeral ship, rouged glass / on huge watery wheels, scores the street.

and smouldering flesh – the emperor's – his cost / is a black fuzzy the flies, / they are tickled to death. / I will admit, I prefer love.

Jon Silkin

## At the Porta Humana

We, the intelligent, / who print ourselves with words, / dream of a race as natural as snails / who talk by walking on footpaths / and whose clatter shines / through clambering of customs.

There, behind the words, / those artful facades for which / so many sacrifices are demanded, / even to the agony that hardens, / sits Stuff, old signaller / of sickness, always wanting things.

To be loved, to be lovable, / and to print 'not negotiable' / on moments of high illumination – / that's his uncreating touch, / turning perfection back / into personal dots and quavers.

Naturally, real truth / in its comely self-protection / shuns this guardian of drabs: / it takes holidays / among tragic brochures, / even to the pliant madhouse.

The galleries, the gardens / fill with its humanist harvest, / its Belvederes are impaled on beauty. / Stuff sits sharpening pencils, / writing explanatory letters / about love to the psychiatrists.

And the great gong sounds, / ordering, *Forget your fear of faces,* / of the inexplicable, men in the lift / with too much loathing – / populate the prose-world, / insensate the verses.

But can there be a time / for platonism in this jazz? / Can the plates and arms of fear and love / keep a species talking? Which words / will come through air unbeat, / saying, so to say, only what they mean?

Peter Porter

## Jacob

This mother's darling, pickpocket in his pride, / Who lives by smiles, deceit, dumb-insolence, / Is sent out to secure a fitting bride / And takes the road in high self-confidence.

By noon there is no road – no shadows move / But his; the desert light glares hard and clear, / A lucid proof that he is owed no love, / That what pervades his solitude is fear.

The young man sleeps, his head propped on a stone, / Exposed to starlight and the vacant skies: / The angels climb, descend, and he is shown / Their ladder's length drawn up from where he lies.

First light, and cold air chills the dreamer's face / Waking to silence, in an empty place.

## II

By sunset they had reached a shallow stream: / The women crossed and he was left alone / Unable to advance. As in a dream / A man with features known but scarcely known

Stood in his path and in the dusk they closed, / Strained against the snow against the snow: / Who was the stranger whom his strength opposed, / The dark shape jealous of his liberty?

Dawn came, and locked within their stubborn fight / The traveller knew whose arms withheld him there: / "Bless me" he cried "Bless me before the light / Dissolves your substance to realness air"

And one whom strength and skill could not confound / Was forced by benediction to the ground.

Dick Davis



# The hunting of free wild creatures

Eric Hobsbawm

P. B. MUNSCHÉ

Gentlemen and Poachers  
The English Game Laws 1671-1831  
255pp. Cambridge University Press.  
£18.50.  
0 521 23284 8

P. B. Munsché's excellent book is more interesting than the run-of-the-mill piece of historical revisionism it claims to be. He is perfectly right in drawing attention to the ignorance of most of those who have incidentally written about the Game Laws, that is to say most social historians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Not the least of the merits of his study is that it provides an informed and lucid guide through the jungle of the laws relating to the hunting and killing of wild animals and birds from the seventeenth century to the Game Reform Act of 1831. Henceforth ignorance is no longer excusable.

On the other hand Dr Munsché's "historical revision" does not amount to much, and will surprise only those who believe that all poachers were sent to Tasmania by the flat of stony-hearted squires. Is the view that the Game Laws were a means of class oppression in the hands of the gentry a biased one? The author cannot but agree that these laws, based on the Game Act of 1671 which gave only the gentry (0.5 per cent of the population) the legal right to kill game by virtue of landownership, were indeed an example of blatant class legislation. Was their administration, as the Webbs argued, "grossly partial, selfishly biased and swayed by considerations of their own class interest, even to the verge of corruption"? The charge is not entirely dismissed. Perhaps not surprisingly, Munsché finds the evidence "at best, ambiguous". Some magistrates were judges in their own cases, but more, while identifying with their neighbours, were not. Moreover, there were limits to bending the law and local opinion increasingly imposed some control on the abuse of the JP's summary power.

Where the laws savage or unduly harsh? He contends that they were not, since the bulk of offenders were summarily sentenced under statutes which limited the penalty to a fine of £5 or three months in jail, and shows that most of the - presumably professional - poachers, were able to pay the fine. He argues that the draconian Night Poaching Act, after 1773, and especially those after 1800, were not typical and most poachers were not tried under them, though he also points out that any poaching which could be classified not under the Game Laws

but as the stealing of private property (eg. of deer and rabbits) risked seven years' transportation. As he points out, in the eighteenth century an offence against property "was a very serious matter". But then, as historians have known since Halévy pointed it out in 1913, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries "all the penalties prescribed by (the law) were equally extravagant and ... equally ill-applied."

We may conclude that Munsché's efforts will not win any retrospective friends for the eighteenth-century law for the gentry's monopoly of killing the creatures technically defined as "game" or for the administration of the laws which confined this monopoly to those with freehold worth at least £100 a year, permanent tenancies worth at least £150 a year, or who were sons and heirs-apparent of esquires or other persons of "higher degree".

Yet this is a minor issue. The value of Munsché's book, and the reason why it can be strongly recommended, lies in the fact that he sees it essentially as "a study of the values of the landed gentry and the manner in which they tried to impose these on the eighteenth century". They failed, - as he shows admirably - not only because in a

bourgeois Britain the gentry increasingly isolated itself from the rest of the propertied classes by claiming an exclusive privilege of rank, but also because hostility to the Game Laws united "the great body of the lower classes against the higher classes", and thus (as was observed in 1819) "the morals of the country were deteriorated to an alarming degree" in the post-Napoleonic era. As the author sees, "it was the present threat of social disorder ... which alarmed the reformers and inspired their tireless agitation for a change in the game laws." History records impassively that it was gentry, farmers and middle classes which primarily benefited from the reforms of the 1830s.

If one were to criticize this book, it would therefore be for not paying as much attention to the values of those who did not belong to the gentry as to its own. For the hunting of free wild creatures was a profoundly ideological matter, since it was (and often still is) the fundamental conviction of common men that they have been "ordained from the beginning free for any one who could undertake them", to quote a Bedfordshire farmer cited by Munsché. To establish exclusive class rights over what belonged to God was

therefore an infringement of natural law, and in itself unjust; a view shared by Blackstone. Both the establishment of a monopoly of killing game and its breach (poaching) could not but be political acts, whatever their other functions.

For the excluded middle class, consuming or giving away game, symbolized at least an equal claim to privileged status. If game was "an essential ingredient in every entertainment that has the slightest pretensions to elegance", it was not on gastronomic grounds. Since game could not be killed, and only barely traded, legally, it was provided by a large body of full-time professional poachers - there were said to be 500 in Norfolk alone in 1787 - and a gigantic black or rather grey market. This in turn drove the gentry into an increasingly strident and ruthless defence of the privilege which symbolized both the superiority of the rural gentleman's way of life to the cash-grubbing urban and mercantile society, and the superiority of the gentry as a class to its rivals.

For the labouring poor, poaching was one of the Rights of Man, and for these with political consciousness, a form of class struggle. ("I have

poached with more bitterness against the Class", James Hawker recalls in his journal as *A Victorian Poacher*. "If I am able, I will Poach Till I Die.") To what extent the "massive increase in poaching activity" in the early nineteenth century was due to commercial demand, to the hunger of unemployed labourers or to the assertion of the rights of freemen men, may be impossible to establish. But that increase is not to be doubted. And, as the author suggests, it was not an accident that the Game Laws were finally reformed within a few months of the 1830 labourers' revolt, which was much in the minds of English gentlemen.

The reform hardly diminished poaching. The equal right of the citizen to kill wild creatures was not established, perhaps luckily for the survival of some of them. The history of Victorian poaching remains to be written. (It would have to include such episodes as the long-lasting "Second Rebecca Riot" of Welsh fish poachers.) This is not Dr Munsché's subject. His contribution to the history of British society is nevertheless large and invaluable. He has written a monograph which nobody interested in English history can afford to neglect.

## Poultry thoughts, fowl papers

D. J. Enright

Page Smith and Charles Daniel

The Chicken Book  
400pp. North Point Press,  
5500 Talbot Avenue, Berkeley,  
California 94706. \$10.  
0 86547 067 7

Their obvious and indeed ubiquitous usefulness aside, poultry had always struck me as a boring and even unpleasant breed of creature. In a lazy way I put this down to their marked resemblance to human beings in the latter's less pleasing aspects. Chicks of course are lovable little milks, but they grow up. Hens busybody around, pecking at other hens with their sharp tongues and doing nothing much with an air of desperate diligence - except, admittedly, laying eggs with every sign of competence. As for cocks, we know about them. They inflict their brief attentions on reluctant hens who thereafter return to their non-business as if nothing had happened; they glare out portentously from the tops of dunghills; they make a fearful racket (apparently in the belief that, if they didn't, the sun would forget to rise); and they don't lay eggs.

Such paltry opinions are bound to be

changed by a reading of this compendium of facts and fancies, a project hatched by a historian and a biologist with the help of a flock of students. Like the curate's egg - to get the obvious joke over - it is varied in its parts, at times solidly informative, at times undeniably entertaining, while here and there (and finally) leaving a bad taste in one's mouth. Did you know - I'm not sure which category this comes into - that "the vixen needed to produce many thousands of elephants would fit comfortably within the shell of even a small hen's egg"? Or, which may amount to much the same thing, whereas on average a woman deposits 0.019 per cent of her body-weight into her eggs daily, a hen deposits 1.8 per cent? Small wonder that the hen is described as the tragic heroine of this story, and also "the embodiment of the Protestant ethic".

Among other matters Messrs Smith and Daniel discuss the origins (antediluvian) and history (the ancients are full of sound practical advice on upkeep) of the chicken; its place in anthropology; the women of the Sena Naga tribe are forbidden to eat hens that lay in different places lest they grow promiscuous; the complex biological history of the egg, which is a subject in itself with its own iconography and so forth; the hen in literature and folklore, where (as in the field of aphorisms) views tend to cancel out: a whistling woman and a crowing hen are fit for neither God nor man; yet whistling girls and hens that crow make mirth wherever they go; and the hen as a walking medicine-cabinet, affording a cure for practically every known ailment, including baldness and corns: a noblewoman who experienced difficulty in passing water was given the shell of a hatched egg, whereupon she passed twelve glasses full of urine.

Although ancient (the oldest spectator sport?) and world-wide, cock-fighting may be thought to take up disproportionate space here - except by cock-fighters, but can they read? In addition to its surreptitious life, the sport is still legal in nine American states, including Oregon, Arizona, Arkansas and Florida, and there are various specialist magazines; among them one winningly called *Grit and Steel*. An anthropologist tells us that "the deep psychological identification of Balinese men with their cocks is unmistakable", meaning both of what he says.

Incidentally, the authors stray in implying that the common slang term for "penis" comes from the male chicken: it is reckoned to derive from "cock" meaning "top, spout"; the latter may itself have derived from the male bird (the connection is uncertain), in which case the comparison is with the fowl's outstretched neck and hence sexual. (Partridge has a punning conflation

obsolete or very rare, "cockpit", defined as "pudendum muliebri".) Returning to the Balinese, we find no indication that they (or cockers of any other kind) "sublimate" sex through cock-fighting, and this suggests that, despite the theory of "ritual release", neither do they sublimate violence. Anecdotes recounted here of the owners of fighting-cocks subsequently tearing one another to pieces provide evidence sufficient to controvert that high-flown theory.

The cock is rich in iconography. To begin with, it has featured as a symbol of the life force: "the extreme erectness of the cock, straining upward, has suggested to many besides the Greeks the erectness of a tumid penis" and there is even some such representation in the Vatican, where naturally "the intention is not pornographic but religious". None - or not much - the less, "the sexual aspect of the cock was ubiquitous", as has been the case with many other animals in whom we like to see our own animal nature running riot. One man's upper is another man's downer, and in the cock's aspect as aphoristic the usual contradictions coexist, so that the bird's testicle is a powerful stimulant when bound with the skin of a ram whereas, smeared with duck grease, it inhibits venery.

The anthropologist quoted above remarks that the jokes and obscenities arising from the *double entendre* (which the US term "rooster" was perhaps intended to dodge) are tired, strained and uninviting. Nevertheless he retails them; the present authors repeat them, and alas the present reviewer is quoting them. That life force, whether or not we have a fair share of it, is not easily ignored. To end with, and simply to show there is no defence against a dirty mind, an inadvertent pun which no one else involved seems to have noticed: the thirteenth-century preacher Jacques de Vitry described Christ as a cock who sits up the sleepers and "pricks and stimulates them with the spurs of His admonishments". A charming miracle related here concerns St Germain of Auxerre, in the fifth century, who passed the night in the house of a humble man and was surprised to find that the cocks failed to crow at dawn. The loss of their tongues, he was informed, was the price paid for the privilege of having a bishop as guest. Thereupon he blessed some wheat, and as soon as the cocks had eaten it they began to crow.

According to the account of Meaux or Professor Smith and Daniel, the golden age for poultry was the late nineteenth century: the Victorians, admired in them their own domestic life, reflected in one way, "a benevolent paternalism, second and

docile materfamilias) or another. The rot set in with the development of incubators - invented by the Egyptians and without which the pyramids would never have been built - and gigantic hatcheries, followed by automated techniques for breeding, fattening, killing, gutting and packaging birds for the table. The Japanese discovered the knack of sexing day-old chicks and in one hatchery in 1956 two million baby cockerels were drowned; another example of what the authors call "galloicide" was the destruction in 1972, in southern California alone, of nine million hens to prevent the spread of Newcastle Disease. Poultry factories had arrived, in which the workers were "living machines" busily producing their own deaths - a far cry from the sixteenth-century Ulisse Aldrovandi's vision of the chicken as virtually the cornerstone in a divinely appointed and ordered world.

This section is so harrowing that the reader can hardly whip up much appetite for the section which - separated only by some expert instruction in raising one's own bird - follows: a selection of recipes, Stuffed Chicken Breasts, Poulet à la Stanley. ... Also a recipe for Crocodile Tears: "Unfortunately, just as it is necessary to break a perfect egg to make an imperfect omelette, it is necessary to kill a chicken to prepare it for the table", itself followed by recipes for the killing of chickens: "Those who study refinements in such matters recommend hypnotizing a chicken before killing it, since a chicken is easily hypnotized." No doubt we ought to have been prepared for this, since the introduction told us that the book grew out of an interdisciplinary course held in Cowell College, University of California, Santa Cruz, and that the conclusion of the class was celebrated with a chicken festival and feast. All the same, we may find the project sticking in our gullets. Even writers of theses on Virginia Woolf don't literally eat their subject.

But for the special factor of the egg, one could select practically any other common animal - cow (milk as well as meat), sheep, rabbit, horse - and end up with a book not very dissimilar from the present one. Most beasts have their iconography, all have their biology. What is specific here is the thought of ends with, shaming one for the thought one began with, that the fowl is probably the most useful of all God's creatures and certainly the most dreadfully abused. We must strive, not to love it more, at least to be kinder to it. As a start I shall need to modify my opening paragraph. Poultry do not display the least pleasing aspects of human beings - there is no possibility of their sinking that low - but they bring out the worst in human nature, and suffer from it. If the chicken is to be a symbol, then we know what it must symbolize.

## The deviancy of disease

Collin Gordon

PETER SEDGWICK

Psycho Politics  
292pp. Pluto Press. £4.95.  
0 86104 352 9

The blurb states that *Psycho Politics* "offers a model for the understanding of mental illness which does not insist on the separation of mind and body." This is inaccurate. What is in fact proposed in the book is a cloudy chromothology of illness, which blurs the disparity between physical and mental medicine, thus outflanking those critics who have questioned psychiatry's medical credentials, and assuaging Peter Sedgwick's dictum that "mental illness is illness". "Outside the significances that we voluntarily attach to certain conditions, there are no illnesses or diseases in nature." So all diseases, physical or mental, are social constructs: illness is deviancy. ... There is an extraordinary simplicity about these manoeuvres: who would ever want to deny that psychiatry is a form of medicine, in Sedgwick's sense of the term?

Not much is said in *Psycho Politics* about specifically mental illness, over and above the propositions that it is illness and must not be divided off from non-mental illness. The author's depreciation of what he calls the "pills-and-sympathy dualism" of orthodox psychiatry does not run to explicit disavowal of any particular therapeutic technique that is currently practised by the profession. Sedgwick certainly wants psychiatric institutions to be changed. On the other hand, his informative survey of post-war psychiatry manifests an unremitting hostility to any critical or reformist positions that show disrespect for

professional expertise. His book creates the impression that psychiatry itself, caught between the forces of an inept anti-psychiatric agitation and an inveterate malevolence of the Capitalist State, has had little influence over its own destiny.

A singular feature of Sedgwick's argument is the way in which this undertow of deference to corporate authority converges with his Leninist views on human rights. This side of Revolution, with its inconceivable mutations in our conceptions of freedom, Sedgwick urges the futility of seeking guarantees against oppression in the legal resources of bourgeois individualism. Civil libertarians concerned about possible abuses of medical power are sarcastically advised to turn their efforts to other, more constructive ends (Sedgwick particularly commends the activities of charitable and voluntary groups). More startlingly, Marx and Engels are quoted on the lost pre-capitalist benefits of serfdom, and a forecast of psychiatry's radiant future is presented in the Dutch village of Geel, a sort of community asylum, whose civil population participates with a will in the coercive duties of the collectivity.

The greater part of *Psycho Politics* consists of iconoclastic treatments of four celebrated anti-psychiatric thinkers, incorporating some colourful passages of period reminiscence not unworthy of *The History Man*. Two chapters devoted to R. D. Laing give us a useful and (on the whole) temperate history of that sage's progress. Himself an early opponent of anti-psychiatric ideas, Sedgwick allows himself a certain irony at the expense of those New Left colleagues who saw the change in the 1960s as "one of us". The chapters dealing with Erving Goffman and Thomas Szasz cannot, on the other hand, be regarded as attempting any

kind of coherent account of their work, and the core of both discussions amounts to little better than an ideological mugging. Goffman's endeavour to interpret (in partially) functional terms the workings of the asylum as a "total institution" is damned by Sedgwick as entailing the immutability and inevitability of the asylum. (Other historians of the period have adjudged Goffman's work to have influenced effectively the - doubtless limited and equivocal - "decarceration" of American mental patients during the 1960s and 1970s.) Sedgwick's even more acerbic chapter on Szasz strives to insinuate, by way of a laboured excursus on Herbert Spencer, that only the taboos of post-war life have prevented Szasz from advocating the biological elimination of the socially unfit. Sedgwick later declares this charge proven by his identification of the present rulers of Britain and America as both Social Darwinists and Szaszians.

The author's critique of Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* merits closer scrutiny, since it purports to demonstrate the meretricious character of Foucault's historical scholarship. A bibliographical fact seems to be remarked on here. Sedgwick appears to have worked from what he calls the "shortened English translation" of Foucault's book, of which he states that "the full text has many important passages but these are not crucial to Foucault's argument". Coming from a commentator avowedly preoccupied with scholarly exactitude, this is perhaps not an entirely candid way of conveying the fact that *Madness and Civilization* omits more than half the main text of *Histoire de la folie à l'Age Classique*, as well as its bibliography and over 900 of its notes. One must indeed suppose that Sedgwick has not read the full text of

the book he is writing about, since the untranslated parts of the *Histoire*, whether or not "crucial to Foucault's argument", are highly germane to much of Sedgwick's. This is particularly the case where he takes *Madness and Civilization* with its neglect of such historical trends as the late-Medieval emergence of special institutions for the care and accommodation of the insane, and the eighteenth-century foundations of hospitals and madhouses which foreshadow the psychiatric asylum. *Histoire de la folie* in fact contains quite detailed discussions of all these matters, in passages not included in the English abridgment. Sedgwick compensates elsewhere for this subtractive brand of interpretation by mounting a spirited attack on Foucault's version of the nineteenth-century evolution of the asylum. I can find nothing on this topic in either edition of Foucault's book.

A slightly more tangible issue of contention is what Sedgwick sees as the spurious particularity attributed by Foucault to mental medicine in the Age of Reason. Sedgwick cites what he calls Foucault's "critique of the psychiatric cure of classical rationalism as a series of partial destructions, in which psychological attack and physical intervention are juxtaposed, complement each other, but never interpenetrate". Fair enough, he retorts, but Foucault should have realized that things have always been like this. "From the ancients to the moderns, the constancy and continuity of mechanistic medical practice is evident." Unfortunately, however, the phrase quoted from Foucault does not refer to the Age of Reason at all, but to a quite different and opposite medical régime which (in Foucault's view) succeeded by Sedgwick. Foucault characterizes the Age of Reason as belonging to "the era when the difference between physical 'medicaments' and moral treatments was not yet accepted by medical thought" - in other words, as the

precise contrary of Sedgwick's perdurable "medico-social dualism".

Some of the more piquant moments in this chapter occur where Sedgwick endeavours to sustain his contention that Foucault's use of evidence is "careless and licentious". *Madness and Civilization* remarks of Philippe Pinel's celebrated work, the *Traité médico-philosophique*, that its style of moral treatment "used the therapeutic methods that had become known in the eighteenth century, but used them as chastisements". It transpires that Sedgwick has a particular reason for objecting to this part of Foucault's study: he fears that the latter's views "apparently exclude any ascription of responsibility, in the form of blame or punishment, from the sane to the insane". Sedgwick thus asserts that Pinel's use of the cold-water *douche* is "a simple measure of coercion in the maintenance of order. Therapy and repression are seen as distinct, not confounded or substituted in the way that Foucault suggests. It is the greater good of the institutional community, not the personal benefit of the patient, that guides the physician's hand on the cold-water tap." Sedgwick merely deplores here "Pinel's recommendation of a method so easily misunderstood as a mystifying therapy".

The passage of Pinel's *Traité* which expounds his views on "*douches*" considered as means of repression" is barely two pages long, and some of its main passages are quoted in Foucault's book. One may concede to Sedgwick that Pinel begins by commending the *douche* as a means of restraining refractory behaviour in the asylum. A few lines later, however, it transpires that the one illustrative case cited by Pinel involves nothing less than a cure, obtained by the application of repeated suffering from "periodic mania". As Pinel writes, "the patient is made to understand that it is for her own advantage, and with regret, that we resort to these violent measures".

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# Vat registration

D. H. Mellor

HILARY PUTNAM

Reason, Truth and History  
222pp. Cambridge University Press.  
£15 (paperback, £4.95).  
0 521 23035 7

Hilary Putnam's targets in this book are some deep-rooted dichotomies which he thinks have for too long constricted philosophical and lay thought; notably, the dichotomies between objective and subjective views of truth and reason, and between fact and value. Right thinking, he argues, need not "copy" a wholly independent world describable in principle by "One True Theory" (his derisive capitals), nor yet approximate it according to *a priori* principles of rationality. Neither do we have to suppose that our thought wholly generates or defines our world, subject only, perhaps, to the weak and culture-bound constraints of accommodating sense-data and conforming to local canons of scientific enquiry. Putnam offers an alternative to these fashionable but problematic rivals: namely, that the mind and the world make themselves up together. Facts, including facts about the beautiful and the good (which in turn includes the rational), are whatever may rationally be accepted, and are thus internal to a world evolving jointly with our understanding of it, being therefore neither immutable nor just what *pro tem* we take them to be.

Putnam's sales pitch for his alternative starts with the "brains in a vat" puzzle, a modern embodiment of old-fashioned scepticism. Imagine our brains not in our bodies, acting in and on the rest of the world (as we take it to be) and getting feedback from it through our senses, but kept going instead in a vat of nutrients and wired to computers that reproduce exactly the feedback we get from the real world. Would they not think themselves embodied as our brains actually are? But how then do we know that our brains are embodied and that we ourselves are not just brains in a vat? Putnam thinks neither of his rivals can solve this puzzle, because the objectivist makes the world too independent of what we think of it, while the subjectivist makes it too independent enough. Objectivism implies that whatever we think, we might still be brains in a vat, which is incredible; subjectivism that brains thinking they are embodied makes them embodied which is equally incredible. What Putnam thinks is that our being embodied and acting in the world is a precondition of our brain processes constituting thoughts about it, a precondition that brains in a vat would not satisfy. Brains in a vat could not therefore think even that they were brains in a vat since we could, we aren't.

This solution to the vat puzzle seems to me dead right. Like many other pragmatists, including F. P. Ramsey in the 1920s, I accept Putnam's so-called "functionalist" view of our desires and beliefs about the world, deriving their content from their perceptual causes and behavioural effects rather than from our consciousness of them. I have indeed argued that even a conscious belief in something can be defined functionally, as believing one believes it, or that consciousness is not an irreducible element even of conscious thought. Since the inner processes of brains in vats would have neither perceptual causes nor behavioural effects they would not be beliefs at all, and *a fortiori* not conscious ones; just as computers lack beliefs, not because they lack our ineffable consciousness, but because they lack desires to combine with their putative beliefs to cause their behaviour.

So the content of our thought about the world, and hence the meaning of our statements about it, does depend on how we actually interact with it. The world and our thought are thus not wholly independent of each other. But it is the content of thought that depends on what goes on in the world (including the behaviour of thinkers), not the other way round. Therefore, shedding the Cartesian misconception

of thought as an exercise of pure consciousness, and the theory of meaning that goes with it, takes no skin off objectivity. The world remains as independent of our thought as it ever was; and Putnam's solution to the vat puzzle does nothing to support the rest of his metaphysics against its objectivist rival. (I am not going to discuss subjectivism, which Putnam does indeed dispose of.)

The fact is that metaphysics has more independent elements in it than Putnam allows. He repeatedly spoils his argument by lumbering his supposed opponents with views they need not hold, and in general by characterizing them both carelessly and tendentiously. I could, for example, think that true – as opposed to false – beliefs and statements are those that "correspond" to the world in some objective way without thinking that, in Putnam's phrase, they "copy" it. One thing may correspond to another without being like it; and, specifically, without being like it in extent. Correspondence theories of truth, as they are usually and properly called, do not commit their proponents to a complete description of the world by One True Theory. For there to be objective truth, there need not be a whole truth, nor even nothing but the truth. There need only be a suitable correspondence between aspects of the world and such actual thoughts and statements as it contains.

Even then, the concept of objective truth need not be based on that of the correspondence it entails. The so-called "redundancy" theory of truth, for instance, which exploits the fact that thinking a belief true is being

aware of having it, entails that one must therefore consciously believe the world to correspond to any belief one thinks true, thereby explaining the idea of truth as correspondence without relying on it. Where the problem really comes, as Ramsey remarked, is in saying not what truth is, but what the contents of beliefs are, i.e. what makes a belief about one thing rather than another. The answer to that question must not of course now appeal to truth, as it would, for example, if it gave the content of a belief as conditions in which it, or a sentence expressing it, would be true. (That answer is not false; it is just no way for a redundancy theorist to define the content of a belief.) The functionalist answer, roughly, is that the contents of beliefs are conditions in which the behaviour that, with given desires, they would cause would be successful, i.e. would gratify the desires. And if we then equate these conditions with truth conditions, we recover the pragmatic conception of truth as what makes beliefs useful, without the evident absurdity of defining truth that way.

This is no place to develop or defend such an account of belief and truth, which I mention only to indicate how naturally Putnam's functionalism may be used to overcome some of his own objections to objectivism. It still remains, of course, to account objectively for the intentionality of our thought and for our ability to refer in thought to specific objects. That is not easy, but it is by no means as hard as Putnam makes out, and certainly no harder for objectivists than for Putnam himself. In the simplest cases, when we refer to what we see, the mechanism of refer-

ence may just be the causal mechanism of perception, a fact that functionalism again naturally accounts for. Admittedly the mechanism is not purely physical, since there is something psychological on the receiving end of it and psychology does not reduce to physics. But that does not make our ability to perceive and limit rationality to the calculation of means to ends. But even if values are as objective as facts, and reason can limit ends as well as means, facts and values are not the same. And yet again, oddly enough, Putnam overlooks a clue to the difference that he could have derived from his own functionalism: namely the way belief and desire may be distinguished functionally by their different roles in mediating between perception and behaviour. For values correspond to right desires much as facts correspond to true beliefs: so we might well base the traditional distinction between them on that between desire and belief, functionally defined, without making values a whit less objective than facts, or beyond the scope of rational assessment. I am not saying I know how to do it; but the project looks to me a lot more promising than Putnam's own reduction of facts to the ill-defined value of rational acceptability.

Although I disagree with Putnam's major thesis, I have made plain what a stimulating, not to say provoking, book this is. The natural vivacity of Putnam's style makes it a welcome relief from much recent portentous philosophy, although it does carry the reader, and I suspect the author, too easily across difficult terrain – as if one thought to tackle Everest in jogging gear.

Nor do I think Putnam's conception of rationality will span the gulf he complains philosophers have opened up between facts and values. That facts and values are connected we may grant; and we may agree with Putnam's strictures on those philosophers, economists and others who would deprive values of objectivity by limiting rationality to the calculation of means to ends. But even if values are as objective as facts, and reason can limit ends as well as means, facts and values are not the same. And yet again, oddly enough, Putnam overlooks a clue to the difference that he could have derived from his own functionalism: namely the way belief and desire may be distinguished functionally by their different roles in mediating between perception and behaviour. For values correspond to right desires much as facts correspond to true beliefs: so we might well base the traditional distinction between them on that between desire and belief, functionally defined, without making values a whit less objective than facts, or beyond the scope of rational assessment. I am not saying I know how to do it; but the project looks to me a lot more promising than Putnam's own reduction of facts to the ill-defined value of rational acceptability.

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## Double vision

John McDowell

ANDREW WOODFIELD (Editor)

Thought and Object: Essays on Intentionality  
316pp. Clarendon Press: Oxford  
University Press. £16.  
0 19 824806 4

As ordinarily conceived, beliefs are states which figure in the explanation of behaviour, and which possess content. (I use "content" here simply as a label for what is specified, more or less accurately, by a "that"-clause in the attribution of a belief.) Recently, however, many philosophers have alleged a tension between these two features of the ordinary conception.

Consider a belief I might express by saying, when a cup is salient in my perceived environment, "That cup has coffee in it." An attribution of this belief to me, with the relevant cup mentioned in a content-specifying "that"-clause, might figure in a common-sense explanation of something I did: say, picking up the cup and drinking it. But now imagine that elsewhere in the universe there is a planet which, along with everything on its surface, is an atom-for-atom replica of Earth. My Doppelgänger there has (no doubt) a belief he might express by saying, "That cup has coffee in it." In attributing this belief to him, we must mention his cup, not mine, in the content-specifying "that"-clause; so the second feature of the ordinary conception distinguishes the state he is in from the state I am in. But the states that figure in the explanation of our cup-drinking behaviour are not claimed, exemplifications of the same type; so the first feature of the ordinary conception dictates a different taxonomy.

This thought-experiment (a variant of one proposed by Hilary Putnam) is supposed to motivate a double-aspect view of such content-bearing psychological states. One aspect takes in their representing of the world; the other embraces their explanatory role. Since one aspect supposedly imposes a different taxonomy from the other, our ordinary conception of these states – which unconsciously amalgamates two different sorts of interest – seems open to objection; it suggests, it plausibly suggests, a unitary approach to theoretical reflection about psychological explanation.

Idea like this are prominent in Andrew Woodfield's collection, though there are divergences about the character of the recommended non-unitary approach. Woodfield, Daniel Dennett and (in the particular case of beliefs) Keith DeRose, each try to preserve, each in a different way, some approximation to the ordinary notion of content as a property of the explanatory states (the states I share with my Doppelgänger); whereas Colin McGinn denies that the explanatory states have content at all.

But why should we accept that in terms of explanatory states that Doppelgänger of mine and I are indistinguishable? Common sense distinguishes a belief about my cup from a belief about his; and it takes the difference to account for a difference in our behaviour – I drain my cup, he drains his. If there is really only one explanatory state, this idea must be an illusion; the difference in our behaviour must be explained, not by a difference in our psychological states, but by the difference in our environment, interacting with a state we share. But, though there is no denying the availability (in principle) of an explanation having this second structure, it is not clear why we should accept the idea that would supersede the explanation with the first structure that common sense envisages (constituting a clearly better execution of the task which the common-sense explanation undertakes). If I were imperceptibly transported to my Doppelgänger's position at the right moment, no doubt I would drain his cup. But this proves the point only if the behaviour would have to be explained in terms of the very state which explains my actual behaviour; and the alternative conception can handle the case by holding that the move would give me (without my knowing it) a different belief (one with a different content).

The fact is that the Doppelgänger thought-experiment constitutes no argument at all for the double-aspect view. Offering it as one merely betrays an unguarded assumption about psychological explanation: that psychology "in the strict sense", or at least a singled-out component within that, is distinct (the literally) inner states that figure in the causation of (some) behaviour.

In his Foreword, Woodfield suggests

that explanations in terms of our common-sense "object-involving" states – my belief about my cup, my Doppelgänger's about his – would defy regimentation in terms of laws. But even if we grant that psychological explanation is of a sort to require such regimentation, this is inconclusive. Certainly it would be silly to look for laws relating to beliefs about particular cups. But the laws in question would relate to beliefs about (say) perceptually presented objects, and it is not obvious that no such laws are to be expected.

I suggested that my being transported, imperceptibly, to my Doppelgänger's position would give me, without my knowing it, a different psychological state. This suggestion is profoundly offensive to a Cartesian conception of mental states. For a Cartesian, mental states are infallibly known to their owners, and hence fixed independently of anything their owners might be ignorant of. I believe this idea is the foundation of the double-aspect view. It is supposed, I think, that Descartes' own conception of mind was defective only in its dualism. Dualism represents mental states and events as either epiphenomena, which would be scientifically superfluous, or non-physical causes and effects, which would violate the laws of conservation. These troubles vanish if, while preserving the essence of the Cartesian conception (the autonomy of its topic from questions on which the subject is fallible), we contrive to reconstruct its topic as something material; and this yields the envisaged subject-matter of the "explanatory role" approach to psychological states.

But this depends on a shallow diagnosis of Descartes' mistake. Descartes' most serious difficulties stem, in fact, not from the supposed immateriality of the soul, but from its supposed independence of everything external – the very feature which what we might call "the new Cartesianism" seeks to preserve. In Descartes himself, these difficulties surface in the form of an intolerable epistemology: the new Cartesianism seems confident that they are safe from any such trouble, but there is room for suspicion here.

Cartesian philosophy of mind supports, and is supported by, a primitive philosophy of language. Russell's failure to understand Frege (partly explicable in terms of Russell's

Cartesian conception of mind) hangs heavy over many of these pages. Eric Tyler Burge, whose thesis is radically anti-Cartesian, points it up by a contrast with a version, which he accepts, of the prevailing view about thoughts expressible with the use of indexical terms, such as "here", "I", "you", etc.; this version involves an account of the distinction between content and context which – once one appreciates the possibilities for demonstrative modes of presentation (in Frege's sense) – loses all motivation except some version of the new Cartesianism.

Philosophy of mind is very active nowadays, and in some quarters there is a healthy sense of progress, as the interests of philosophers converge with those of workers in a burgeoning area of science. My suspicion is, however, that even as cognitive science and the study of "artificial intelligence" take wing, the philosophy of mind, hanging on to their tail-feathers, is being swept back into its dark ages. In some ways, indeed, things are worse than before: at least what Descartes misconceived was, clearly enough, the mind; whereas the new Cartesianism risks forgetting what the philosophy of mind is supposed to be about. In some versions this is obscured, because the internal states of information-processing machines bear some resemblances to the content-bearing states of common-sense psychology; Stephen Stich, at the end of his essay, hints at the idea that we might discard the concepts of ordinary psychology in favour of those of a new cognitive science, purged of the borrowings from "folk psychology" that taint its offerings so far; this strikes me as envisaging that the concept of mind might be not so much forgotten as officially abolished. It is high time for a critical examination of the assumption that what cognitive science is casting light on is something on which some dim illumination has hitherto been shed by "folk psychology".

Strange though it may now seem, I think this is a very valuable collection. Each of the contributions is, in its own way, admirable: clear, well-constructed and resourceful. Reflecting on the points of similarity and contrast between the essays cannot but sharpen one's views about the topics discussed. Anyone interested in the notion of content of thought will have to read and digest this book.

## FICTION

# Topping and tuppung

E. S. Turner

GEORGE MACDONALD FRASER

Flashman and the Redskins  
479pp. Collins. £7.95.  
0 00 222661 8

It is nearly five years since we were last helped to the turpitudinous adventures of Flashman, the bully from *Tom Brown's School Days* who, in the resourceful hands of George MacDonald Fraser, became General Sir Harry Flashman VC. In the last, and sixth, volume, *Flashman's Lady*, he was "chief stud and bath attendant" to a dark Messalina in Madagascar. Now comes a generous further instalment of his North American exploits, in which he ends up being saluted by a Harvard man in the shambles of Custer's Last Stand.

It is a two-part book, in which the unflagging Mr Fraser provides some pretty twists of plot. In the first half Flashy sets out West as a Forty-Niner in command of a mobile brothel and a

party of bronchial patients making the trip for their health; having reached Santa Fe our hero sells one of his female charges to a pimping priest for \$2,000 and decamps (he is known to the Apaches as "Wind Breaker" because he can outride the wind). In the second half he is a Sevician-Sixer, accompanied by his lascivious wife Elsieph (with "the brains of a backward hen") and, as a reward for a mischief-making in Washington, is sucked into the battle with the Sioux at Little Bighorn.

*Flashman and the Redskins* confirms Mr Fraser as a crack story-teller. The challenge he faces, as always, is in deciding how outrageous he can make his lecherous portraiture without losing the reader's indulgence. What about the ethics of selling a whore to a priest? Ah, but the priest needs her for a massacre mission folk, so that's all right; and, as the gallant vendor says, Christianity, shall Flashy join in a mass rape of squaws while men have been defeated? Shall he hold his hand when a papoose is about to be pitted? Shall he continue to "tup" his unofficial

Apache wife with his customary ardour after learning from her own glowing lips how she won a ladies' torture contest to see who could keep the victim alive longest? These are difficult dilemmas which cannot always be resolved by leaping on a horse and galloping hell-for-leather from the scene. For the record, the arch-soundrel is not 100 per cent lost to all sense of honour.

Mr Fraser is in love with the West and knows many of the scenes of the present saga – Bent's Fort, that castle in the wild now painstakingly recreated, complete with early Victorian billiard table; and the field where Custer fell, which he describes as a haunted and deeply moving place. He has read a hundred accounts of the battle and is anxious to get the main elements right. Indeed, he may even have wished that he did not have to desecrate the hill of memories by having Flashman scalped there, in evening dress, shouting "Don't shoot! I'm British!" But the show must go on.

Though tansured by a tomahawk, Flashman did not suffer a complete lid removal, and the ravages showed only

demonstration (as to cronies in the Travellers' Club). Normally, as we learn from this ever-knowable book, partial scalping was discouraged, because the authorities who paid bounties for scalps were being cheated by rogues who took two scalps from one head.

Aside from all the topping and tuppung, the book contains some spirited set-piece descriptions. Flashman is, of course, the narrator and nothing eludes his disabused eyes, ears and nose, whether on the battlefield or at a guts-eating competition. On the Santa Fe Trail the most interesting thing was the litter of gear from trains that had passed ahead of us – it was like all the left-luggage offices in the world strewn out for hundreds of miles. How does an Apache brave smell? Answer: like a goat in an organ loft.

What next? Flashman is supposed to have died in 1915. If we cannot have him as a dugout Railway Transport Officer at Victoria in 1914, perhaps he could die in the saddle at a remount depot at Etaples.

more successful and enjoyable second novel *The Broken Tree*, which was concerned with the settling of her native New Zealand, by Scottish immigrants in the nineteenth century.

*Love and War* returns to New Zealand to chronicle the effects of the Second World War on that country. Once again the relevant facts are made abundantly clear.

In the early hours of May 10 Hitler launches his invasion of the Netherlands. Three days later the Dutch Government sets sail for England. Within 24 hours the country had surrendered. On May 12 German forces, for the first time since 1914, crossed the French border. Old-fashioned cavalry regiments were sent into the field against crack German motorised troops. The outcome was a massacre. In a matter of days the Allied advance, designed to cover the retreat of the Belgian Army, had been halted. Once again Hitler had used airborne troops with devastating results.

And so on in regular doses. Sadly, though, when Ms Sandys tries to move beyond the not exactly unfamiliar historical information she has gathered, things begin to go wrong.

The reader is offered a melodramatic story. George Trewith and Anna Creighton got married in 1939, only to be separated by the war. He enlists and is sent first to Egypt, then to Greece, and finally to Crete where he chooses to stay behind during the evacuation of the island, joins the local resistance, becomes a hero, and the falls in love with a seventeen-year-old girl. His wife stays behind on the sheep farm, gives birth to a son, and has an affair with a conscientious objector whose feelings of guilt ultimately force him to leave her. When husband and wife get together again, both are sadder and wiser, and their marriage begins in earnest.

Accompanying this central tale are the activities of a number of secondary characters such as George's shy friend

Mike Fernshaw, who dies defending Greece against the invading Germans, a Maori named Wiremu Honeybee who becomes increasingly conscious of his ethnic identity even as he fights the white man's war, a childhood friend of Anna's who overcomes her pacifist upbringing and becomes an army nurse, and survivors from an earlier New Zealand Expeditionary Force who can remember Gallipoli and the desert. All these figures, however, are so devoid of life that their presence only adds to the prevailing air of thinness, just as the clumsily-done battle scenes, rather than lessening, actually increase the tediousness of the narrative.

In the extensive "Acknowledgements" section someone is credited with having taught Ms Sandys that fact is "stronger" than fiction. If this is a misprint, it is a felicitous one, for it sums up the problem with her work, which is that the facts she deals with are usually stronger than her fictions, and refuse to be moulded by them into an artistically pleasing shape.

# If one small baby...

Laura Marcus

TOM HART

Cradle Song  
154pp. Quartet. £6.95.  
0 7043 2322 2

"But, sirs, I beg, do not give way to indignation/Each creature needs the help of all creation." Thus the refrain of Brecht's poem, "On the Infanticide Marie Farrar", the stark stanzas of which recount the story of a servant girl who, on discovering that she is pregnant, is forced to conceal her state from her employers, gives birth in silence on a freezing night, and clubs her child to death when it begins to cry.

*Cradle Song* is a version for the 1980s. The novel opens with an as-yet unnamed girl in a bed-sit, alone but for a crying baby, in a state of panic, both at her isolation and from fear that the child's noise will result in eviction by her landlady, she throws the baby against the wall. The "cradle song" of the title is the rhyme "Ten Green Bottles", which she sings to the dead child; its sinister aspect becomes clear in the final pages of the novel, when the bewildered girl, on being questioned by the police about the death, murmurs in response her own version of the lullaby: "And if one small baby should accidentally fall/There'd be no small baby, left to love at all."

The events which lead to the infanticide are recounted in one long flashback. The girl, Dorothy, is presented as a bright fifteen-year-old involved in her school-work and ambitious for a future which will be "different". She becomes pregnant, however; her mother rejects her, and she moves in with her boyfriend, Les. They attempt to create the domestic security and comfort both of them have been denied in their family lives, until Les is arrested and imprisoned when the police discover that he has been stealing the furniture for their home. Alone after the birth of the child, Dorothy is driven to the act of blind violence which kills it.

Tom Hart has worked with disturbed adolescent girls, and his presentation of Dorothy and her story is sympathetic. Behind the novel are the harsh outlines which compose a social worker's case-history: Dorothy's mother – depressive, suicidal; Les's mother – alcoholic, former prostitute; no father in either case. The author is careful in apportioning blame, and emphasises the problems of communication rather than poverty. Offering no solutions, the work sets out rather to provide a partial answer to the question "How could anyone do that to their own child?"

However, the difficulties of building a narrative from a case-history become immediately apparent. The author relies heavily on dialogue, which, partly due to the retrospective structure of the novel, is too often of the "You remember when your father died of cancer three years ago" variety. A desire for authenticity results in excessive and often pointless detail, yet the setting of the story remains curiously vague. Dorothy moves from "home" to "school" to "the hospital" to "unlocated" and "unlocatable"; this is presumably an attempt to avoid the "regionalism" of the social problem novels of the 1950s and 60s, but it offers the reader none of the sense of place which was one of their chief strengths.

Finally, though, the problem is not one of weak characterization, banal dialogue or unrealised locations, but the more fundamental question of how effective the "realist" novel can be in communicating society's ills. Concern for the victims of our social order need not preclude the use of irony, distancing or rather more artistry than is employed in *Cradle Song*. Brecht's lesson was that form is a political as well as an aesthetic issue.

The summer 1982 issue of *Critical Quarterly* (Volume 24, No. 2, 86pp, £3.00) contains a long review of Ian McEwan's novel, *The Comfort of Strangers*, by J. R. Banks, and an essay on F. R. Leavis's theory of language in *The Living Principle*, by Hugh Bredin.

Savkar Altinel

ELSPETH SANDYS

Love and War

375pp. Secker and Warburg. £7.95.  
0 436 44140 3

Contrary to popular belief, "faction" is not a new conception. Historical novelists have been practising the art of blending research and invention for years with varying degrees of success. Some of them managing by this means to bring their chosen periods to life, others conspicuously failing to do so.

Elspeth Sandys is unfortunately in the latter category. Her first book *Catch a Falling Star*, a biography of the young John Donne disguised as a novel, gave one the impression that nothing was added to the dutifully recounted facts of the poet's life by the fictional liberties she took, and it was difficult not to have similar feelings from time to time while reading her

## Siesta in Eden

Alan Bold

STEPHEN BECKER

The Blue-Eyed Shan  
200pp. Collins. £7.50.  
0 00 222138 1

Though offered as the final part of Stephen Becker's "Far East" trilogy, this is an autonomous novel that shares an exotic setting rather than a story with *The Chinese Bandit* (1975) and *The Last Mandarin* (1979). It is appropriate that each book should be independent in character and narrative, since the question of what thematic link between the three novels Becker himself is a man of many cultures (with first-hand experience of the United States) and he is adept at exploring the individual as he adapts to a particular environment. His principal characters are men unsettled by nature and uncertain by nurture. Each in his own way is a misfit who is made to draw beyond to conflicting loyalties.

There is Olevisky, the Russian prince who finds himself in 1949 on the Burma border retreating before the Chinese Communists. Olevisky's aristocratic assumptions make him a natural enemy of Communism, but it becomes clear that he is not an ideologist but an opportunist who has been "whipped" only three things: money, horses and fornication. And now there was no more Russia and no more war and he lay in a decrepit American truck with a boiled Chinese steamed egg. There is General Yang, who was born in Peking and educated in

European ways so that "at twenty-one Yang Yu-lin spoke, read and wrote Mandarin Chinese, a little Scots English, some Latin and much French, and had studied world history, physiology, government, economics (including the mysterious Marx) and French literature."

Greenwood, the hero, is the most unlikely character of all. As an anthropologist he has worked in the field in Pawlu village, in the valley of the Little River Mon. Pawlu is a paradise, a Shangri-la; or, as General Yang puts it, Pawlu is a small, happy village either in China or in Burma, and it is where we are going, and for once in our lives we shall visit decent people and do no harm. Greenwood is accepted as a member of Pawlu's Shan tribe, leads the Shan in guerrilla warfare against the Japanese in 1942, is honoured with Shan tattoos, takes a Shan woman as his concubine, fathers a Shan daughter, then goes back to the US where all is confusion: "Greenwood was thirty-one years old and a hero in his own eyes and he was scared half to death of this clattering, frenzied new world."

In the novel, then, all roads lead to Pawlu. As he returns there, tempted by a letter from General Yang who promises access to the bones of Peking Man, Greenwood feels he has come home. The noble savagery of the Far East has been a refuge for the technological impact of the West. Making his way on a wagon train with natives carrying American arms he reflects on the philosophical irony of it all: "East is East, Greenwood decided, and West is West, and they were as hell have met. In the aftermath of war Burma was a thirty-calibre society." Like Greenwood, Becker enjoys making rather obvious alludes on the

utility of war while relishing the descriptive possibilities of action.

As the tale unfolds it is apparent that the three men – Olevisky, Yang and Greenwood – are working out the demands of a destiny. Some powerful force brings the Russian, the Chinese and the American to a village where they have to make a choice between honour and ignominy, life and death. The three come together in conflict; Becker eschews psychological subtlety and portrays his characters as men of action able to rise spectacularly to the military occasion. Since both Olevisky and General Yang are soldiers by profession and inclination, it is a relatively straightforward matter for Becker to allow them to act on impulse and reveal themselves by gesture. Greenwood, though, is a scholar and (like Becker) a Harvard gentleman. He has to be motivated.

Over and above his commitment to his mistress, his daughter and his adopted tribe, Greenwood has a duty to search for anthropological truth.

DAVID SERAFIN

Madrid Underground

212pp. Collins. £6.75.  
0 00 231664 1

Superintendent Luis Bernal's second case opens with the discovery of a shop-window dummy, leaking red blood, in a carriage on the Madrid underground system. More sinister finds follow, in other carriages on other lines. Well written and neatly assembled; Bernal is an interesting character, and the atmosphere is thickly and authentically Spanish. A map of the Madrid metro is thoughtfully included.

DOUGLAS CLARK

Shelf Life

174pp. Gollancz. £5.95.  
0 575 03081 X

Douglas Clark's usual pair, Chief Superintendent Masters and Chief Inspector Green, are called in from Scotland Yard by a local police force after the death, in suspicious circumstances, of a young man in a police station cell. Masters and Green are as good company as ever; it's a pleasantly unpretentious novel with a well-constructed plot and an interestingly new poison.

T.J.B.